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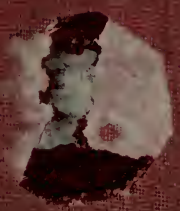
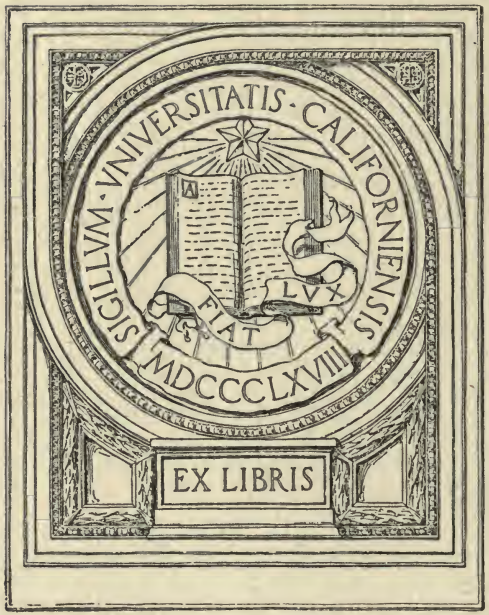
WORKHOUSE CHARACTERS

MARGARET W. NEVINSON

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WORKHOUSE CHARACTERS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN THE WORKHOUSE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

The International Suffrage Shop, John St., Strand, W.C. 2 (6d.)

Press Notices

"Dull talk none the less offensive because it may have been life-like."—*Daily Mail.*

"The piece though mere talk is strong talk."—*Morning Advertiser.*

"The play is clean and cold and humorous. The main value of the piece is that it is a superb genre picture. One or two of the flashes from this strange, generally unknown world are positive sparks of life."—*Sheffield Daily Telegraph.*

"I found it interesting and convincing; but then I am prepared to believe that our laws always will be rotten till lawyers are disqualified from sitting in Parliament."—*Reynolds'.*

"The masculine portion of the audience walked with heads abashed in the *entr'acte*; such things had been said upon the stage that they were suffused with blushes."—*Standard.*

"Delicate matters were discussed with much knowledge and some tact."—*Morning Post.*

"'In the Workhouse' reminds us forcibly of certain works of M. Brieux, which plead for reform by painting a terrible, and perhaps overcharged, picture of things as they are. . . . The presence of the idiot girl helps to point another moral in Mrs. Nevinson's arraignment, and is therefore artistically justifiable; and the more terrible it appears the better have the author and the actress done their work. . . . Such is the power of the dramatic pamphlet, sincerely written and sincerely acted. There is nothing to approach it in directness and force. It sweeps all mere prettiness into oblivion."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

"It is one of the strongest indictments of our antiquated laws relating to married women. A man seated behind the present writer called the play immoral! and as Mrs. Nevinson says in her preface to the published edition, the only apology she makes for its realism is that it is true."—*Christian Commonwealth.*

"The whole thing left an unpleasant taste."—*Academy.*

NOTE.—Two years after this piece was given by the *Pioneer Players* the law was altered.

WORKHOUSE CHARACTERS

AND OTHER SKETCHES OF THE LIFE OF THE POOR

BY

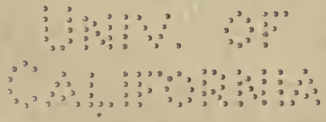
MARGARET WYNNE NEVINSON

L.L.A.

The depth and dream of my desire,
The bitter paths wherein I stray,
Thou knowest Who hast made the Fire,
Thou knowest Who hast made the Clay.

One stone the more swings to her place
In that dread Temple of Thy Worth—
It is enough that through Thy grace
I saw naught common on Thy earth.

RUDYARD KIPLING.



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Almost the whole of these sketches have appeared in the *Westminster Gazette*; the last two were published in the *Daily News*, and "Widows Indeed" and "The Runaway" in the *Herald*. It is by the courtesy of the Editors of the above papers that they are reproduced in book form.

First published in 1918

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TO MY SON

C. R. W. NEVINSON

PREFACE

THESE sketches have been published in various papers during the last thirteen years. Many of the characters are life portraits, and the wit and wisdom of the common people have been faithfully recorded in a true Boswellian spirit; others are *Wahrheit und Dichtung* (if one may still quote Goethe), but all have been suggested by actual fact and experience.

During the last ten years great reforms have been taking place in the country. In 1908 the Old Age Pensions Act came into force, and the weekly miracle of 5s. a week (now 7s. 6d.) changed the world for the aged, giving them the liberty and independence, which ought to be the right of every decent citizen in the evening of life.

The order by which a pauper husband had the right to detain his wife in the workhouse by "his marital authority" is now repealed. A case some years ago of this abominable breach of the law of Habeas Corpus startled the country, especially the ratepayers, and even the House of Commons

were amazed at their own laws. The order was withdrawn in 1913 on the precedent of the judgment given in the case of the Queen *v.* Jackson (1891), when it was decided "that the husband has no right, where his wife refuses to live with him, to take her person by force and restrain her of her liberty" (60 L. J. Q. B. 346).

Many humane reforms and regulations for the classification of inmates were made in 1913, and the obnoxious words "pauper" and "workhouse" have been abolished; but before the authorities rightly grasped the changes the war was upon us, the workhouses were commandeered as military hospitals, the inmates sent into other institutions, and all reforms lapsed in overcrowded and understaffed buildings.

Once again the Poor Law is in the melting-pot, and it seems as if now it will pass into the limbo of the past with other old, unhappy far-off things.

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WORKHOUSE CHARACTERS

EUNICE SMITH—DRUNK

> The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
> But Here and There as strikes the Player goes;
> And He that toss'd you down into the Field,
> *He* knows about it all—He knows—*He* knows.

"EUNICE SMITH, drunk, brought by the police."

The quaint Scriptural name, not heard for years, woke me up from the dull apathy to which even the most energetic Guardian is reduced at the end of a long Board meeting, and I listened intently as the Master of the workhouse went on to explain that the name Smith had been given by the woman, but her clothes and a small book, which the doctor said was Homer, in Greek, were marked Eunice Romaine.

Eunice Romaine—the name took me back down long vistas of years to a convent school at Oxford, to the clanging bells of Tom Tower, to the vibrant note of boys' voices in college chapels, to the scent of flowers and incense at early celebrations, to the high devotions and ideals of youth, to its passionate griefs and joys. Eunice

Romaine had been the genius of our school—one of those gifted students in whom knowledge seems innate; her name headed every examination list, and every prize in the form fell to her; other poor plodders had no chance where she was. From school she had gone with many a scholarship and exhibition to Cambridge, where she had taken a high place in the Classical Tripos; later I heard she had gone as Classical Mistress to one of the London High Schools, then our paths had separated, and I heard no more.

I went down to the Observation Ward after the meeting, where between a maniacal case lying in a strait-waistcoat, alternately singing hymns and blaspheming, and a tearful melancholic who begged me to dig up her husband's body in the north-east corner of the garden, I saw my old friend and classmate.

She was lying very quiet with closed eyes; her hair had gone grey before her time, and her face was pinched and scored with the deep perpendicular lines of grief and disappointment; but I recognized the school-girl Eunice by the broad, intellectual brow and by the delicate, high-bred hands.

"She is rather better," said the nurse in answer to my question, "but she has had a very bad night, screaming the whole time at the rats and mice she thought she saw, and the doctor fears collapse, as her heart is weak; but if she can get some sleep she may recover."

Sleep in the crowded Mental Ward, with maniacs

shrieking and shouting around! But exhausted Nature can do a great deal, and when I called some days later I found my old friend discharged to the General Sick Ward, a placard above her head setting forth her complaint as "chronic alcoholism, cirrhosis of the liver, and cardiac disease."

She recognized me at once, but with the apathy of weakness she expressed neither surprise nor interest at our meeting, and only after some weeks had passed I found her one evening brighter and better, and anxious to go out. Over an impromptu banquet of grapes and cakes we fell into one of those intimate conversations that come so spontaneously but are so impossible to force, and I heard the short history of a soul's tragedy.

"Just after I left Cambridge mother died. She told me on her death-bed that I had the taint of drink in the blood, and urged me never to touch alcohol. My father—a brilliant scholar and successful journalist—had killed himself with drink whilst we were all quite young; mother had kept us all away at school, so that we should not know, and had borne her burden alone. I promised light-heartedly; I was young and strong, and had not known temptation. After mother died I was very lonely: both my brothers had gone to Canada. My father's classical and literary abilities had come only to me: their talents were purely mechanical and they had never been able to acquire book knowledge. I was not very happy teaching. Classics had come to me so

easily—hereditary question again—that I never could understand the difficulties of the average girl, and I had very little patience with dullness and stupidity. However, very soon I became engaged to be married, and lived for some time in a fool's paradise of love and joy. My *fiancé* was a literary man—I will not tell you his name, as he is one of those who have arrived—but it is difficult to start, and we waited about two years before he got an appointment sufficiently secure to make marriage possible. I was very busy; we had taken a flat, and I was engaged in choosing furniture and preparing my humble trousseau. I had given notice at the school, and the wedding-day was within a fortnight, when one morning I got a letter from my *fiancé*, couched in wild, allegorical language, bemoaning his unworthiness, but asking me to release him from his engagement, as he found his love for me had been a mirage now that he had come across his twin-soul. I read the letter over and over again, hardly grasping the meaning, when there fell from the envelope a little newspaper cutting that I had overlooked—it was the announcement of his marriage three days before to his twin-soul.

" Still I was unable to realize what had happened. I kept saying over and over to myself, ' Charlie is married,' but in my heart I did not believe it. That afternoon the head-mistress came to see me; she was very kind, and took me herself to a brain specialist, who said I had had a nervous shock, that I ought to have a rest, and mountain

air would be best for me. The council of my school agreed to take me back again, and allow me a term's holiday on full pay. One of my colleagues (it was holiday-time) came with me to Switzerland, and there, amid the ice and snow of the high latitudes, the full understanding of what had come to me dawned upon my mind, and I realized the pangs of despised love, of jealousy, and hate. A *Nachschein* of Christianity suddenly made me rush back to England in terror of what might happen ; it is easy to commit suicide in Switzerland, and a certain black precipice near the hotel drew me ever towards it with baleful fascination. Some one dragged me again to Harley Street, and this time the great specialist advised sea air and cheerful society. The latter prescription is not available for lonely and jilted high-school mistresses in London, but I tried sea air, and it did me good. I don't think for a moment that the doctor realized that I was practically off my head ; the terrible obsession of love and jealousy had me in its grip. It had taken me some time to fall in love, and I could not fall out again to order, whilst the knowledge that the man who had broken his promise to me now belonged to another woman was driving me to madness. One day I went down to bathe, and suddenly determined to end my woe. I swam out far to sea—so far that I judged it beyond my force ever to get back ; but though my will commanded my limbs to cease their work they refused to obey. I was always a very strong swimmer,

and I landed again more humiliated than ever: I had not even the pluck to end my sorrows.

"After that I went back to work; mountains and sea had no message for me. I was better sitting at my desk in the class-room, trying to drill Latin and Greek into the unresponsive brains of girls.

"I got through the days, but the nights were terrible; all the great army of forsaken lovers know that the nights are the worst. I used to lie awake hour after hour, sobbing and crying for mercy and strength to endure, and I used to batter my head against the floor, not knowing any one could hear. One night a fellow-lodger, who slept in the next room, came in and begged me to be quiet; she had her work to do, and night after night I kept her awake with my sobbing. 'I suppose it is all about some wretched man,' she observed coolly; 'but, believe me, they are not worth the love we give them. I left my husband some years ago, finding that he had been carrying on with a woman who called herself my friend. At first I cried and sobbed just as you do now; but I felt such a fool making such a fuss about a man who had played it down so low, that I made up my mind I would forget him; and in time you will get over this, and give thanks that you have been delivered from a liar and a traitor.'

"She gave me a glass of strong brandy and water; it was the first I had ever tasted, and I remember how it ran warm through my veins, and how I slept as I had not slept for months.

" My fellow-lodger and I became great friends ; she was quite an uneducated woman, the matron of a laundry, but she braced me up like a tonic with her keen humour and experience of life.

" How strange it seems for a middle-aged drunkard in a pauper infirmary to be telling this ancient love-tale, and posing as one of ' the aristocracy of passionate souls.' But *tout passe tout casse,* and after years of anguish and strife I woke up one bright spring morning and felt that I was cured and for ever free of the wild passion of love. That day always stands out as the happiest of my life. I shall never forget it. It was Saturday, and a holiday ; and I got on my bicycle and rode off for miles far into the country singing the *Benedicite* for pure joy. I lunched at a little inn on the Thames, and ordered some champagne to celebrate the recovery of my liberty.

" But by strange irony of fate the very day I escaped from the toils of love I fell under another tyranny—that of alcohol. Now, Peg "—I started at the unfamiliar old nickname of my school days —" I believe you are crying. Having shed more than my own share of tears, nothing irritates me so much as to see other women cry, and if you don't stop I'll not say another word."

I drew my handkerchief across my eyes and admitted to a cold in the head.

" Shortly afterward I received notice to leave the High School. I did not mind—I always hated teaching, and I found that I had the power of writing ; an article that I could flash off in a

few hours would keep me for a week, and I could create my own paradise for half a crown—now, Peg, you are crying again. But of late life was not so bad. I enjoyed writing, and shall always be thankful I can read Greek; besides, I was not always drunk; the craving only takes me occasionally, and at its worst alcohol is a kinder master than love. I shall be well enough to go out in a few days; bring me some pens and paper, and my editor will advance me some money. I am going to write an article on workhouse infirmaries that will startle the public. What do you know of workhouses? You are only a Guardian; 'tis we musicians (or rather inmates) who know."

The article never got written. The next day I found Eunice very ill; she was unconscious and delirious till her death, reeling off sonorous hexameters from Homer and Virgil and stately passages from the Greek tragedians.

We spared her a pauper funeral, and a few old school and college friends gathered round the grave. A white-haired professor of world fame was there also, and he shook hands with us as we parted at the cemetery gates. "Poor Eunice!" he said, his aged face working painfully. "One of the best Greek scholars of the day, and the daughter of my oldest friend. Both of them geniuses, and both of them with the same taint in the blood; but I feel I ought not to have let her come to this."

I think we all felt the same as we walked sadly home.

DETAINED BY MARITAL AUTHORITY

(By the law of England the mothers of illegitimate children are often in a better position than their married sisters.)

An unusual sense of expectancy pervaded the young women's ward; Mrs. Cleaver had gone down "to appear before the Committee," and though the ways of committees are slow, and pauper-time worthless, it was felt that her ordeal was being unduly protracted.

"She's having a dose, she is," said a young woman walking up and down, futilely patting the back of a shrieking infant. "I 'ate appearing afore them committees; last time I was down I called the lady 'Sir' and the gentleman 'Mum,' and my 'eart went pitter-patter in my breast so that you might have knocked me down with a feather. 'Ere she is—well, my dear, and you do look bad——"

"Them committees allus turn me dead sick, and, being a stout woman, my boots feel too tight for me, and I goes into a perspiration, and the great drops go rolling off my forehead. Well,

'e's kept 'is word, and got the law and right of England behind 'im."

What reporters call a "sensation" made itself felt through the ward; the inmates gathered closer round Mrs. Cleaver, and screaming infants were rocked and patted and soothed with much vigour and little result.

"Well," said Mrs. Cleaver, sinking on to the end of a bed, "I went afore the Committee and I says, 'I want to take my discharge,' I says; I applied last week to the Master, but mine got at 'im first, and Master up and says—

"'No, Mrs. Cleaver, you can't go,' he says; 'your 'usband can't spare you,' he says, 'wants you to keep 'im company in 'ere,' he says.

"'Is that true, Master?' says the little man wot sits lost in the big chair.

"'That is so, sir,' says Master, and then 'e outs with a big book and reads something very learned and brain-confusing that I did not rightly understand, as to how a 'usband may detain his wife in the workhouse by his marital authority.

"'Good 'eavens!' says the little lady Guardian 'er wot's dressed so shabby. 'Is that the law of England?'

"Then they all began talking at once most excited, and the little man in the big chair beat like a madman on the table with a 'ammer, and no one took the slightest notice, but when some quiet was restored the little man asked me to tell the Board the circumstances. So I says 'ow he lost his work through being drunk on duty, which

was the lying tongue of the perlice, for 'is 'ed was clear, the drink allus taking him in the legs, like most cabmen, and the old 'oss keeps sober. It was a thick fog, and he'd just got off the box to lead the 'oss through the gates of the mews, and the perliceman spotted 'is legs walking out in contrary directions, though 'is 'ed was clear as daylight, and so the perlice ran 'im in and the beak took his licence from 'im, and 'ere we are.

" Now I've got over my confinement, and the child safe in 'eaven, after all the worrit and starvation, I thought I'd like to go out and earn my own living—I'm a dressmaker by trade, and my sister will give me a 'ome ; I 'ate being 'ere—living on the rates, and 'e not having done better for us than this Bastille—though I allus says as it was the lying tongue of a perliceman—it seems fair I should go free. The lady wot comes round Sundays told me I ain't got no responsibility for my children being a married lady with the lines. Then the little man flew out most violent : ' Don't talk like that, my good woman ; of course you have responsibility to your children ; you must not believe what ignorant people tell you.'

" Then I heard the tall, ginger-haired chap wot sits next to the little man—'im as you unmarried girls go before to try and father your children—I 'eard 'im say quite distinct : ' The woman is right, sir ; married women are not responsible for their children, but I believe the husband is within his rights in refusing to allow her to leave the workhouse without him.'

"Then they asked me to retire, and the Master told me to come back 'ere, and I should know the result later. Oh, Lord! I'm that 'ot and upset with the worry of it all, I feel I'll never cool again," and Mrs Cleaver wiped her brow and fanned herself with her apron.

"Single life has its advantages," said a tall, handsome woman, who was nursing a baby by the window. "You with the lines ain't been as perlite as might be to us who ain't got 'em, but we 'as the laugh over you really. I'm taking my discharge to-morrow morning, and not one of 'em dare say me nay; I needn't appear afore Boards and be worried and upset with 'usbands and Guardians and things afore I can take myself off the parish and eat my bread independent."

"But why weren't you married, Pennyloaf? Not for want of asking, I'll be bound."

"No, it warn't for want of asking; fact is, I was put off marriage at a very early age. I 'ad a drunken beast of a father as spent his time a-drinking by day and a-beating mother by night—one night he overdid it and killed 'er; he got imprisonment for life, and we was put away in the workhouse schools; it would have been kinder of the parish to put us in the lethal chamber, as they do to cats and dogs as ain't wanted. But we grew up somehow, knowing as we weren't wanted, and then the parish found me a situation, under-housemaid in a big house; and then I found as the young master wanted me, the first

time as any human soul had taken any interest in me, and, oh, Lord! I laughs now when I think what a 'appy time it was. Since then I've had four children, and I have twenty-five shillings a week coming in regular besides what I can make at the cooking. I lives clean and respectable—no drinking, no bad language; my children never see nor hear what I saw and heard, and they are mine—mine—mine. I always comes into the House for confinement, liking quiet and skilled medical attendance. I never gets refused—the law daren't refuse such as me. I always leaves the coming in till the last moment; then there are no awkward questions, and when they begin to inquire as to settlement, I'm off. All the women in our street are expecting next week, their husbands all out of work, and not a pair of sheets or the price of a pint of milk between them, all lying in one room, too, with children and husbands about, as I don't consider decent, but having the lines, it's precious hard for them to get in here, and half of them daren't come for fear he and some one else will sell up the 'ome whilst they're away. You remember Mrs. Hall, who died here last week? Well, she told me that her husband swore at her so fearful for having twins that the doctor sent her in here out of his way, and what with all the upset and the starvation whilst she was carrying the children, she took fever and snuffed out like a candle. No, the neighbours don't know as I'm a bad woman; I generally moves before a confinement, and I 'as a 'usband on the 'igh seas.

"Well, I'm going back to-morrow to my neat little home, that my lady-help has been minding for me, to my dear children and to my regular income, and I don't say as I envies you married ladies your rings or your slavery."

A WELSH SAILOR

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea.

THE Master of the Casual Ward rattled his keys pompously in the lock of the high workhouse gates, and the shivering tramps entered the yard, a battered and footsore procession of this world's failures, the outcast and down-trodden in the fierce struggle for existence. Some of them were young and strong, some old and feeble, all wan and white with hunger and the chill of the November fog which wrapped like a wet blanket round their ill-clothed bodies. Amongst them was an old man with ear-rings, and thick, curly white hair, with broad shoulders and rolling gait, and as he passed I seemed to feel the salt wind of the sea blowing in my face, and the plunge of the good ship in the billows of the bay. One by one the master shut them up in the dreary little cell where each man is locked for thirty-six hours on a dietary of porridge, cheese, and bread, and ten hours' work a day at stone-breaking or fibre-picking. And yet the men walk in with something approaching relief on their weary faces; the hot bath will restore circulation; and really to appreciate a bed

one should wander the streets through a winter's night, or "lodge with Miss Green" as they term sleeping on the heath.

Half an hour later, as I sat in one of the sick-wards, I felt once again the salt freshness of the air above the iodoform and carbolic, and lying on the ambulance I saw the curly white head of the old sailor, his face blanched under its tan.

"Fainted in the bath, no food for three days; we get them in sometimes like that from the Casual Ward. Wait a moment till I put the pillow straight," said the nurse, as quickly and deftly she raised the hoary head, which has been called a crown of glory.

A few weeks later I passed through the ward, and saw the old man still lying in bed; his sleeves were rolled up, and his nightshirt loose at the throat, and I saw his arms and chest tattooed gorgeously with ships and anchors and flags, with hearts and hands and the red dragon of Wales.

"He's been very bad," said the nurse; "bronchitis and great weakness—been starving for weeks, the doctor thinks. Talks English all right when his temperature is down, but raves to himself in a sort of double-Dutch no one can understand, though we have French and Germans and Russians in the ward."

"Fy Nuw, fy Nuw, paham y'm gadewaist?" cried the old man, and I recognized the cry from the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

"Oh! lady," he exclaimed as I sat down beside

him—" oh ! lady, get me out of this. My mates tell me as I'm in the workhouse, and if my old mother knew it would kill her—it would, indeed. Yes, lady, I follow the sea—went off with my old dad when I was eight year old ; we sailed our old ship *Pollybach* for wellnigh forty years ; and then she foundered off Bushy Island Reef, Torres Straits, and we lost nearly all we had. After that I've sailed with Captain Jones, of the *Highflyer*, as first mate ; but now he's dead I can't get a job nohow. I'm too old, and I've lost my left hand ; some tackle got loose in a storm and fell upon it, and though the hook is wonderful handy, they won't enter me any more as an A.B.

" I'm a skipper of the ancient time—a Chanteyman and a fiddler. I can navigate, checking the chronometer by lunar observation. I can rig a ship from rail to truck ; I can reef, handsteer, and set and take in a top-mast studding sail ; and I can show the young fools how to use a marlin-spike. Yes, indeed ! But all this is no good now.

" I came up to London to find an old shipmate —Hugh Pugh. We sailed together fifty years ago, but he left the sea when he got married and started in the milk business in London. We was always good mates, and he said to me not long ago, down in Wales, that the Lord had prospered him, and that I was to turn to him in any trouble. So when my skipper died I remembered me of Hugh Pugh, and slung my

bundle to come and find him. Folks was wonderful kind to me along the road, and I sailed along in fair weather till I got to London; and then I was fair frightened; navigation is very difficult along the streets—the craft's too crowded—and folks were shocking hard and unkind. I cruised about for a long time, but London's a bigger place than I thought, knowing only the docks; and David Evans doesn't seem to have got the address quite ship-shape, and I just drifted and lost faith. Somehow it's harder to trust the Lord in London than on the high seas. Then the mates tell me I fainted and was brought into the ship's hospital; and here I've lain, a-coughing, and a-burning, and a-shivering, with queer tunes a-playing in my head; couldn't remember the English, they say, and talked only Welsh; and they thought I was a Dutchman. This morning I felt a sight better, and though the nurse told me not to get up, I just tried to put on my clothes and go; but blowed if my legs didn't behave shocking—rolled to larboard, rolled to starboard, and then pitched me headlong, so that I thought I'd shivered all my timbers. So I suppose I must lie at anchor a bit longer; my legs will never stand the homeward voyage, they're that rotten and barnacled; but I'll never get better here; what I'm sickening for is the sea—the sight of her, and the smell of her, and the noise of the waves round the helm; she and me's never been parted before for more than two days, and I'm as sick

for her as a man for his lass. Oh, dear! oh, dear! If I could only find Hugh Pugh——"

I suggested that there was a penny post. "Yes, lady; but, to tell the truth, I haven't got a stamp, nor yet a penny; and David Evans hasn't got the address ship-shape. The policeman laughed in my face when I asked him where Hugh Pugh lived, and said I must get it writ down better than that for London." Out of his locker he drew a Welsh Testament containing a piece of tobacco-stained paper, on which was written—

HUGH PUGH, Master Mariner, now Dairyman;
In a big house in a South-Eastern Road,
Off the North-road, out of London, Nor-East by Nor.

Fortunately, Hugh Pugh is not a common name—a visit to the library, a search in the trade directory, and a telephonic communication saved all further cruising.

A couple of days later I got a letter from Hugh Pugh—

DEAR MADAM,

I thank you for your communication with regard to my old friend and shipmate, Joshua Howell, of whom I had lost sight. I am glad to say I am in a position to find him some work at once, having given up my London business to my sons, and taken a house down by the sea. I am in want of a good waterman to manage a ferryboat over the river and to take charge of a small yacht, and I know that I can

trust old Joshua with one hand better than most men with two. There is a cottage on the shore where he can live with his mother; and tell him we shall all be delighted to welcome an old friend and shipmate. My daughter is coming down here shortly with her children, and will be very glad for Joshua to travel with her; she will call and make arrangements for him to go to her house as soon as he is well enough to be moved. I enclose £5 for clothes or any immediate expenses, and am sorry that my old friend has been through such privations. As to any expenses for his keep at the infirmary, I will hold myself responsible.

Yours faithfully,
HUGH PUGH.

LLANRHYWMAWR, *December* 6.

A Welsh letter was enclosed for the old sailor, over which he pored with tears of joy running down his cheeks.

A few days later Hugh Pugh's daughter's motor throbbed at the door of the workhouse, and the old tar rolled round shaking hands vigorously with the mates: "Good-bye; good-bye, maties; the Lord has brought me out of the stormy waters, and it's smooth sailing now. He'll do the same for you, mates, if you trust Him."

Then the door closed, and the fresh breeze dropped, and it seemed as if the ward grew dark and grey.

THE VOW

Better thou shouldest not vow than thou shouldest vow and not pay.

THE heavy machines in the steam-laundry clanked and groaned, and the smell of soap and soda, cleansing the unspeakable foulness of the infirmary linen, rose up strong and pungent, as the women carried out the purified heaps to blow dry in the wind and sunshine.

The inmates worked hard and steadily under the keen eye of the matron; many of them knew by bitter experience that inattention or gossip might cost them the loss of fingers at the calenders and wringing machines. Most of the women were strong and able-bodied, and yet the briefest inquiry would reveal some moral flaw rendering them incapable of competing in the labour market—drink, dishonesty, immorality, feeble-mindedness. Amongst the heavy, uncomely figures I noticed a young woman, tall and well-grown, with a face modest and refined, framed in masses of dark hair under the pauper cap. She was folding sheets and table-cloths, working languidly as if in pain, and I drew the matron's attention to the fact.

"Yes, I don't think she'll finish the day's work. I told her to go over to the infirmary if she liked, but she said she would rather stay here as long as she could. Yes, usual thing, but she is a better class than we get here as a rule."

A few days later I saw her again in the lying-in ward, a black-haired babe in the cradle beside her, and her hair in two rope-like plaits hanging over the pillow nearly to the ground.

She looked so healthy, handsome, and honest amongst the disease and ugliness and vice around that one wondered how she came to the workhouse. "Yes," said the nurse, in answer to my thoughts, "she is not the sort we have here generally. No, I don't know anything about her; she is very silent, and they say she refused to answer the relieving officer." I sat down beside her and tried to talk about her future, but the girl answered in monosyllables, with tightly shut lips, as if she were afraid to speak.

"Won't the father of your child do anything for you?"

"I do not wish him to."

I had been a Guardian long enough to respect reticence, and I rose to go. The darkness of the December afternoon had fallen in the long, half-empty ward, the sufferers dozed, the wailing of babes was hushed, all was strangely quiet, and as I reached the door I heard a voice, "Please come back, ma'am; I should like to ask you something." Then, as I turned to her bedside

again, " I have not told any one my story here ; I don't think they would believe me ; but it is true all the same. But please tell me first, do you hold with keeping a vow ? "

" Yes, certainly I do."

" That is why I am here. I swore an oath to my dying mother, and I have kept it. I did not know how hard it would be to keep, but because I would not break it I have come to disgrace. When we were children we had a cruel, drunken father, and I seem to remember mother always crying, and at night we would be wakened with screams, and we used to rush in and try and stop father beating her to death, and the cruel blows used to half shatter our poor little bodies. One night we were too late, and we saw mother wrapped in a sheet of flame—and her shrieks ! It is fifteen years ago now, but they still ring in my ears. The neighbours came and the police, and they put out the fire, and took mother to the hospital and father to the lock-up. Mother did not live long and she suffered cruel. The next day they took us children to see her. We hardly knew it was mother ; she was bandaged up with white like a mummy, and only one black eye blazing like a live coal out of the rags—she had beautiful eyes—made us know her. The little boys cried, so that nurse took them out again, but they let me stay with her all night, holding a bit of rag where her hand had once been. Just as the grey dawn came in at the windows mother spoke,

very low so that I had to stoop down to hear: 'Hester, my child, swear to me you will never marry, and I will die happy. The boys can look after themselves, but I cannot bear to think of you suffering as I have suffered.'

"'Yes, mother, I'll swear.' No girl of thirteen is keen on marriage, particularly with a father like ours, and I took up the book light-heartedly and swore 'So help me, God.'

"'Thank Heaven, my dear! Now kiss me.'

"I kissed a bit of rag where her mouth had been, and I saw that the black eye was dim and glazed, and the eyelid fell down as if she were sleeping. I sat on till the nurses changed watch, and then they told me she was dead.

"Father got a life sentence, the boys were sent to workhouse schools, and some ladies found me a situation in the country near Oxford. When I was about seventeen the under-gardener came courting me. He was a straight, well-set-up young chap, and I fell in love with him at once, but when he talked about marriage—having good wages—I remembered my oath. Jem said an oath like that wasn't binding; and when I said I'd live with him if he liked, he was very shocked, having honourable intentions, and he went and fetched the vicar to talk to me. He was a very holy man, with the peace of God shining through his eyes, and he talked so kind and clever, telling me that mother was dying and half-mad with pain and weakness, and that she would be the first to absolve me from such a vow. I couldn't

argue with him, and so I forgot my manners, and ran out of the room for fear he'd master me. When Jem saw nothing would move me he went off one morning to America, leaving a letter to say as he had gone away for fear he should take me at my word and be my ruin.

"Things were very black after that; I had not known what he was to me till the sea was between us, and, worse than the sea, my oath to the dying. I left my good situation because I could not bear it any longer without him, and I came up to London and got into bad places and saw much wickedness, and got very lonely and very miserable, and learnt what temptation is to girls left alone. I used to go into the big Catholic cathedral by Victoria Station and kneel down by the image of the Virgin and just say, 'Please help me to keep my oath.'

"Then one day in spring, when all the flowers were out in the park, and all the lovers whispering under the trees, I remembered I was twenty-seven, and though I could never have a husband at least I might have a child. A great wave of longing came over me that I could not resist, and so I fell. And then later, when I knew what was coming to me, I was filled with terrible remorse—leastways one day I was full of joy because of my baby, and the next day I was fit to drown myself in shame. Then the Sunday before I was brought in here I went to service in St. Paul's. I had felt sick and queer all day, and I just sat down on one of the seats at the

back and listened to the singing high and sweet above my head, like the chanting of the heavenly host. I was always fond of going to St. Paul's, and once on my Sunday out I even went to the Sacrament, and I says, 'O God, I've lost my character, but I've kept my oath. You made me so fond of children; please don't let me eat and drink my own damnation.'

"I sat and thought of this, puzzling and puzzling, and the hot air out of the gratings made me drowsy, and I fell asleep and dreamt it was the Judgment Day, and I stood with my baby before the Throne, and a great white light shone on me, bleak and terrible, so that I felt scorched with blinding cold. And the angel from his book read out: 'Hester French and her bastard child.'

"Then there came a little kind voice: 'She kept her oath to her dying mother, and remember, she was a woman and all alone'; and I knew it was the Virgin Mary pleading for me. And then a voice like thunder sounded: 'Blot out her sin!' and all the choirs of heaven sang together; and I awoke, but it was only the organ crashing out very loud, and the verger shaking me because he wanted to lock up. Oh, ma'am, do you think as my sin will be forgiven? At least I kept my vow."

BLIND AND DEAF

Oh, human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
To cheer thee and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

MARY GRANT, pauper, of Sick Ward 42, had been making charges of unkindness against Nurse Smith, and I had been appointed by the House Committee to inquire into the matter. I found a somewhat harassed-looking nurse filling up temperature-charts in a corner of the ward, and she began volubly to deny the charges.

"The woman's deaf, so it is no good shouting at her, and I believe she is angry because I can't talk on my fingers; but what with looking after both wards and washing and bathing them all, and taking their temperatures and feeding them, and giving them their medicine, I have not time to attend to the fads and fancies of each one. Granny Hunt, too, takes half my time seeing that she does not break her neck with her antics; and as to scraping the butter off Grant's bread I hope as the Committee did not attend to such a tale."

The last accusation, I assured her, had not even been brought before us, and I passed down the long clean ward where lay sufferers of all ages and conditions—the mighty head of the hydrocephalous child side by side with the few shrivelled bones of an aged paralytic. I passed the famous Mrs. Hunt—a "granny" of ninety-six, who "kept all her limbs very supple" and herself in excellent condition by a system of mattress gymnastics which she had evolved for herself. Two comparatively young people of seventy and eighty, who were unfortunate enough to lie next her, complained bitterly of Granny's restlessness; but the old lady was past discipline and "restraining influences," and, beyond putting a screen round her to check vanity and ensure decency, the authorities left her to her gymnastic displays. On the whole, though, the ward was very proud of Granny; she was the oldest inhabitant, not only in the House but also in the parish, and even female sick-wards take a certain pride in holding a record. The old lady cocked a bright eye, like a bird, upon me as I passed her bed, and, cheerfully murmuring "Oh, the agony!" executed a species of senile somersault with much agility.

Round the blazing fire at the end of the ward (for excellent fires commend me to those rate-supported) sat a group of "chronics" and convalescents—a poor girl, twisted and racked with St. Vitus's dance, white-haired "grannies" in every stage of rheumatic or senile decay, and a

silent figure with bowed head, still in early middle life, who, they told me, was Mary Grant.

I shouted my inquiries down her ear *crescendo fortissimo*, without the smallest response—not even the flicker of an eyelid—whilst the grannies listened with apathetic indifference.

"Not a bit of good, ma'am," they said presently, when I paused, exhausted; "she's stone deaf."

Then I drew a piece of paper from my pocket and wrote my questions, big and clear.

"Not a bit of good, ma'am," shouted the grannies again; "she's stone blind."

I gazed helplessly at the silent figure, with the blood still flowing in her veins, and yet living, as it were, in the darkness and loneliness of the tomb.

"If she is blind and deaf and dumb, how does she manage to complain?"

"Oh! she manages that all right, ma'am," said a granny whose one eye twinkled humorously in its socket; "she's not dumb—not 'alf. The nuss that's left and Mrs. Green, the other blind lidy, talk on her fingers to her, and she grumbles away, when the fit takes 'er, a treat to 'ear; not as I blimes her, poor sowl; most of us who comes 'ere 'ave something to put up with; but she 'as more than 'er share of trouble. No, none of us know 'ow to do it—we aren't scholards; but you catches 'old on 'er 'and, and mauls it about in what they call the deaf-and-dumb halphabet, and she spells out loud like the children."

I remembered with joy that I also was "a

scholard," for one of the few things we all learned properly at school was the art of talking to each other on our fingers under the desks during class. A good deal of water had flowed under London Bridge since then, but for once I felt the advantage of what educationists call "a thorough grounding."

"How are you?" spelt out a feeble, harsh voice as I made the signs—I had forgotten the "w" and was not sure of the "r," but she guessed them with ready wit—then in weird rasping tones, piping and whistling into shrill falsetto like the "cracking" voice of a youth, she burst into talk: "Oh! I am so thankful—so thankful. It seems years since any one came to talk to me—the dear nurse has left, and the other blind lady's gone to have her inside taken out, and the blind gentleman is taking a holiday, and I have been that low I have not known how to live. '*Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit; in a place of darkness and in the deep. Thine indignation lieth hard upon me; and Thou hast vexed me with all Thy storms.*' David knew how I feel just exactly—might have been a deaf and blind woman himself, shut up in a work'us. I have been here nigh on two year now; I used to do fine sewing and lace-mending for the shops, and earned a tidy bit, being always very handy with my needle; then one day, as I was stitching by the window—finishing a job as had to go home that night—a flash of lightning seemed to come and hit me in the eye somehow—I remember how the fire

shone bright zig-zag across the black sky, and then there was a crash, and nothing more.

"No, it was not a very nice thing to happen to anybody; two year ago now, and there has been nothing but fierce, aching blackness round me ever since, and great silence except for the rumblings in my ears like trains in a tunnel; but I hear nothing, not even the thunder. At first I fretted awful; I felt as if I must have done something very wicked for God to rain down fire from heaven on me as if I had been Sodom and Gomorrah; but I'd not done half so bad as many; I'd always kept myself respectable, and done the lace-mending, and earned enough for mother, too—fortunately, she died afore the thunder came and hit me, or she'd have broken her heart for me. It was very strange. Mother was such a one to be frightened at thunder, and when we lived in the country before father died she always took a candle and the Book and went down to the cellar out of the way of the lightning—seemed as if she knew what a nasty trick the thunder was going to play me—she was always a very understanding woman, was mother—she came from Wales, and had what she called 'the sight.'

"Yes; I went on fretting fearful about my sins until the blind gentleman found me out—him as comes on Saturdays and teaches us blind ladies to read. Oh, he was a comfort! He learned me the deaf alphabet, and how to read in the Braille book, and it's not so bad now. He

knows all about the heavenly Jerusalem, and the beautiful music and the flowers blossoming round the Throne of God. I think he's what they calls a Methody, and mother and I were Church. I used to go to the Sunday School, and learnt the Catechism, and 'thus to think of the Trinity.' However, he's a very good man all the same, and a great comfort—and he found me a special text from God: 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.' That is the promise to me and to him; being blind, he understands a bit himself, though what the hulla-balloo in my ears is no tongue can tell.

"Mrs. Green, the other blind lady, is such a one to be talking about the diamonds and pearls in the crowns of glory; but I don't understand nothing about no jewels. What I seem to want to see again is the row of scarlet geraniums that used to stand on our window-sill; the sun always shone in on them about tea-time, and mother and I thought a world of the light shining on them red Jacobys. But the blind gentleman says as I shall see them again round the Throne."

"She wanders a bit," said the one-eyed granny, touching her forehead significantly; "she's such a one for this Methody talk."

I have noticed that the tone of the workhouse, though perfectly tolerant and liberal, is inclined to scepticism, in spite of the vast preponderance of the Church of England (C. of E.) in the "Creed Book."

" Let her wander, then," retorted another orthodox member ; " she ain't got much to comfort her 'ere below—the work'us ain't exactly a paradise. For Gawd's sake leave 'er 'er 'eaven and 'er scarlet geraniums."

" One thing, ma'am, as pleased her was some dirty old lace one of the lidies brought for her one afternoon. She was just as 'appy as most females are with a babby, a-fingering of it and calling it all manner of queer names. There isn't a sight of old lace knocking about 'ere," and her one eye twinkled merrily ; " I guess we lidies willed it all away to our h'ancestry afore seeking retirement. Our gowns aren't hexactly trimmed with priceless guipure, though there's some fine 'and embroidery on my h'apern," and she thrust the coarsely darned linen between the delicate fingers.

" Garn !—they're always a-kiddin' of me. Yes, ma'am, I love to feel real lace ; I can still tell them all by the touch—Brussels and Chantilly and Honiton and rose-point ; it reminds me of the lovely things I used to mend up for the ladies to go to see the Queen in."

They showed me her needlework—handkerchiefs and dusters hemmed with much accuracy, and knitting more even than that of many of us who can see.

As I rose to go she took my finger and laid it upon the cabalistic signs of the " Book."

" Don't you understand it ? That's my own text, as I reads when things are worse than

general: 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Yes, there'll be glory for me—glory for me—glory for me."

I heard the shrill, hoarse voice piping out the old revival hymn, very much out of tune, as I passed down the ward.

I had a nasty lump in my throat when I got back to the Board Room, and I can't exactly remember what I said to the Committee. I think I cleared Nurse Smith from any definite charge of cruelty, something after the fashion of the Irish jurymen: "Not guilty, but don't do it again," adding the rider that Mary Grant was blind and deaf, and if she grumbled it was not surprising.

It is possible my report was incoherent and subversive of discipline, and my feelings were not hurt because it was neither "received," nor "adopted," nor "embodied," nor "filed for future reference," but, metaphorically speaking, "lay on the table" to all eternity.

"AND, BEHOLD, THE BABE WEPT"

And, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion upon him.

THE night-porter sat in his lodge at 1 a.m., trying hard to keep off the sleep that weighed his eyelids down—that heavy sleep that all night-watchers know when nothing in the world seems worth a longer vigil.

But the man before him had been dismissed for sleeping on duty, and our night-porter had had six months out of work, so, with resolute determination, he dragged up his leaden limbs and began to pace the corridors towards the Mental Ward, where he knew the screams of the insane were generally to be relied upon to keep sleep away from any one in the neighbourhood. To-night all was quiet, and it was with a brief prayer of thanksgiving that he heard the insistent note of the electric bell, and rushed to answer it, the lethargy leaving him under the necessity of action.

A policeman entered in a blast of wind and rain, drops off his cape, making black runlets on the white stone floor. From under his arm he drew a red bundle and laid it carefully down

on a mat in front of the fire. "Evening, porter, I've brought you a present from the cabbage-bed. What do you think of that for a saucy girl? Hush, my dear! don't cry," as the babe, unsettled from his warm arms, gave forth a shrill cry of displeasure. "Pretty little thing, ain't she? and left out under a laurel-bush this bitter night. Some women are worse than brutes."

The porter, who was himself a married man, picked up the babe and soothed it in practised arms. "And 'ow about the father? Something as calls itself a man 'as 'ad an 'and in this business, and druv the gal to it, may be. My old dad allus says, 'God cuss the scoundrel who leaves a poor lass to bear her trouble alone!'"

"And now," said the policeman, when the nurse, summoned by telephone, had borne off the indignant babe to the Children's Ward, "I suppose you must enter the case. I found the kid under a laurel-bush at 7, Daventry Terrace. A lady blew a whistle out of the window and said she could not sleep for a whining outside. I tried to put her off as it was cats, but she stuck to it; so, just to quiet her, I cast round with my lantern, and, sure enough, she was right. Mighty upset about it, poor woman, she was, being a single lady. However, as I told her, such things may happen in any garden, married or single."

A name was chosen for her by an imaginative member of the House Committee, remembering his classical education—Daphne Daventry—the

Christian name as an everlasting reminder of her foster parent the laurel-bush.

In due season the familiar notices were posted at the police-stations offering "a reward for the discovery of person or persons unknown who had abandoned a female infant in the garden of 7, Daventry Terrace, whereby the aforesaid female infant had become chargeable to the parish"; and, the Press giving publicity to the affair, offers of adoption poured in to the Guardians —pathetic letters from young mothers whose children had died, and business-like communications from middle-aged couples, who had "weighed the matter" and were "prepared to adopt the foundling."

The Board discussed the question at their next meeting, and the Clerk was directed to inquire into the character and circumstances of the most likely applicants.

"One thing to which I should like to draw the attention of the Board," said a conscientious Guardian, "is the importance of bringing up a child in the religion of its parents."

"Seems to me, in this case," retorted a working-man member, who was also a humorist, "that it might be a good thing to try a change."

And then the Clerk, in his clear legal way, pointed out that the religious question had better not be pressed, as there was small evidence before him as to the theological tenets of the person or persons unknown who had exposed the female infant.

Meantime, the latest workhouse character slumbered in the nursery in passive enjoyment of the excellent rate-supported fires, and was fed with a scientific fluid, so Pasteurized and sterilized and generally Bowdlerized that it seemed quite vulgar to call it milk. The nurses adorned the cot with all the finery they could collect, and all the women in the place managed to evade the rules of classification, and got into the nursery, where they dandled the infant and said it was "a shame."

One of the most devoted worshippers at the shrine of Daphne Daventry was a lady Guardian, a frail and tiny little woman, with a pair of wide-open eyes, from which a look of horror was never wholly absent. She was always very shabbily dressed—so shabbily, indeed, that a new official had once taken her for a "case" and conducted her to the waiting-room of applicants for relief. After such an object-lesson, any other woman would have gone to do some shopping; but not so the little lady Guardian—she did not even brighten her dowdiness with a new pair of bonnet-strings. Though she wrote herself down in the nomination-papers as a "married woman," no one had ever seen or heard of her husband, and report said that he was either a lunatic or a convict.

This mystery of her married life, combined with her "dreadful appearance" and a certain reckless generosity towards the poor, made her many enemies amongst scientific philanthropists.

Her large-hearted charity had been given to the just and the unjust, to the drunk as well as the sober, and the Charity Organization Society complained that her investigations were not thorough, and that the quality of her mercy was neither strained nor trained. But the little lady Guardian opened her old silk purse again and quoted the Scriptures: "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away."

The C.O.S. replied, such precepts had proved to be out of date economically, and nominated a more modern lady, who had missed a great career as a private detective.

But the little lady Guardian had a faithful majority, and her name was always head of the poll.

One afternoon, as the little lady Guardian sat by the fire with Daphne Daventry on her shabby serge lap, a prospective parent, Mrs. Annie Smith, was brought up to see if she "took to the child."

"Oh, what a lovely baby!" she cried, falling on her knees to adore. "What nice blue eyes, and what dear little hands! And her hair is beginning to grow already! Both my children died five years ago; I have never had another, and I just feel as if I could not live without a baby. It is terrible to lose one's children."

"It is worse to have none."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Yes, it is," said the little lady Guardian in a low voice, as if she were talking to herself. "When I was a little girl I had six sailor-boy dolls, and I always meant to have six sons; but directly after my marriage I realized it could never be."

Mrs. Smith had known sorrow, and, feeling by intuition that she was in the presence of no ordinary tragedy, she held her peace.

"Perhaps," she asked presently, "you are going to adopt this baby? You seem very fond of her."

"I love all babies, but I don't think I could adopt one; these workhouse children don't start fair, and I should be too frightened. If the child went wrong later, I don't think I could bear it."

Mrs. Smith had been a pupil-teacher, and in the last five years of leisure she had read widely, if confusedly, at the free library. "But people now no longer believe in heredity. Weissman's theory is that environment is stronger then heredity."

"Oh!" said the little lady Guardian.

"Do read him," said Mrs. Smith excitedly, "and then you won't feel so low-spirited, and perhaps the Guardians will let you adopt the next foundling. But please let me have this one. I have taken to her more than I thought. Oh! please, please——"

"I will vote for you at the next Board meeting," said the little lady Guardian, "and may she make up to you for the children you have lost."

A few days later Mrs. Annie Smith, her honest face beaming with joy, arrived again at the workhouse, followed by a small servant with a big bundle. The attiring of the infant was long and careful, and many came to help, and then Daphne Daventry was whirled away in a flutter of purple and fine linen, and the burden of the rates was lightened.

"MARY, MARY, PITY WOMEN!"

A WOMAN sat alone with folded hands in a dark fireless room. There was little or no furniture to hold the dust, and one could see that the pitiful process known as "putting away" had been going on, for the cleanly scrubbed boards and polished grate showed the good housewife's struggle after decency. On a small table in the centre of the room stood half a loaf of bread, a jug of water, and a cup of milk. The woman bore traces of good looks, but her face was grey and pinched with hunger, and in her eyes was a smouldering fire of resentment and despair.

Presently the silence and gloom was broken by the entrance of a troop of children returning noisily from school. Their faces fell when they saw the scanty meal, and the youngest, a child of four or five, threw himself sobbing into his mother's arms: "Oh, mother, I'se so hungry; we only had that bit of bread for dinner."

"Hush, dear! There is a little milk for you and Gladys; you can drink as far as the blue pattern, and the rest is for her."

The mother kissed him and tried to dry his tears; but it is hard to hear one's children crying

for food; and presently her fortitude gave way, and she began to sob too. The older children, frightened at her breakdown, clung round her, weeping; and the room echoed like a torture-chamber with sobs and wails.

Presently a knock sounded at the door, and a stout, motherly woman entered. "Good evening, Mrs. Blake; I've just looked in to know if you'd bring the children to have a cup of tea with me. I'm all alone, and I like a bit of company. H'albert is always the boy for my money. I just opened a pot of my home-made plum jam on purpose for him. There, my dear, have your cry out, and never mind me! Things have gone badly with you, I know, and nothing clears the system so well as a good cry; you feel a sight better after, and able to face the world fair and square. Now, kiddies, leave mother to herself for a bit and come and help me set the tea things. Let's see, we shall be seven all told; so, Lily, will you run upstairs to Mrs. Johnson—my compliments, and will she oblige with a cup and saucer, as we are such a big party."

The landlady's kitchen was warmed with a big fire, and hermetically sealed against draughts; a big bed took up the greater part of the room, and this formed a luxurious divan for the four children, to whom the hot tea and toast, the tinned lobster, and the home-made jam were nectar and ambrosia. Mrs. Blake had the place of honour by the fire, and when the meal was over the children were advised to run out for a

game in the street, and Mrs. Wells, turning her chair round to the cheerful blaze, said soothingly—

"Now, my dear, you look a bit better. Tell us all about it."

"Yes, you were quite right; we have to go into the workhouse. I went round to the Rev. Walker, and he advised me to go to the police-station, and they told me there as I and the children had better become a burden to the rates as we are destitute, and they can start looking for Blake, to make him pay the eighteen shillings a week separation order. To think of me and my children having to go into the House, and me first-class in the scholarship examination! It breaks my heart to think of it."

"Yes; you've 'ad a rough time, my dear—worse than the rest of us, and we all have our troubles. I remember when you came a twelve-month ago to engage the room, and you said you was a widow. I passed the remark to Wells that evening: 'The lidy in the top-floor back ain't no widow; mark my words, there's a 'usband knocking about somewhere!' On the faces of them as are widows I have noticed a great peace, as if they were giving of thanks that they are for ever free from the worritings of men, and that look ain't on your face, my dear—not by a long chalk!"

"Yes, he's alive all right; I got a separation order from him a couple of years ago. He went off with a woman in the next street, and though he soon tired of her and came back again, I felt

I could not live with him any longer; the very sight of him filled me with repulsion and loathing. Father and mother always warned me against him; father told me he saw he wasn't any good; but then, I was only nineteen, and obstinate as girls in love always are, and I wouldn't be said. Poor father! I often wish as I'd listened to him, but I didn't, and I always think it was the death of him when I went home and told him what my married life was. He had been so proud of me doing so well at school and in all the examinations. Just at first we were very happy after our marriage. He earned good money as a commercial traveller in the drapery business; we had a little house in Willesden, and a piano, and an india-rubber plant between the curtains in the parlour, and a girl to help with the housework, and I, like a fool, worshipped the very ground he walked on. Then, after a time, he seemed to change; he came home less and took to going after women as if he were a boy of eighteen instead of a married man getting on for forty. He gave me less and less money for the house, and spent his week-ends at the sea for the good of his health. One very hot summer the children were pale and fretting, and I was just sick for a sight of the sea, but he said he could not afford to take us, not even for a day-trip; afterwards I heard as Mrs. Bates was always with him, there was plenty of money for that. That summer it seemed as if it never would get cool again, and one evening in late

September my Martin was taken very queer. I begged my husband not to go away, I felt frightened somehow, but he said as some sea-air was necessary for his health, and that there was nothing the matter with the boy, only my fussing. That night Martin got worse and worse; towards morning a neighbour went for the doctor, but the child throttled and died in my arms before he came. I was all alone. I didn't even know my husband's address, and when I went with the little coffin all alone to the cemetery it seemed as if I left my heart there in the grave with the boy. He was my eldest, and none of the others have been to me what he was. Later on all the girls caught the diphtheria, but they got well again, only Martin was taken. Blake seemed a bit ashamed when he got back; but he left Willesden, some of the neighbours speaking out plain to him about Mrs. Bates, and he not to be found to follow his child's funeral. He tried to make it up with me; but I told him I was going to get a separation order, as I'd taken a sort of repulsion against looking at him since Martin had died alone with me, and the magistrate made an order upon him for eighteen shillings a week—little enough out of the five or six pounds a week he could earn before he took to wine and women and Mrs. Bates. My little home and the piano were sold up, and I soon found eighteen shillings a week did not go far with four hungry children to clothe and feed, and rent beside. I tried to get back in my old

profession, but I had been out of it too long, no one would look at me, and I could only get cooking and charing to do—very exhausting work when you haven't been brought up to it. At first I got the money pretty regular, but lately it has been more and more uncertain, some weeks only eight or ten shillings, and sometimes missing altogether. He owes me now a matter of twenty pound or more, and last week I braced myself up and determined to do what I could to recover it. If it was only myself, I'd manage, but, work hard as I can, I can't keep the five of us, and it has about broke my heart lately to hear the children crying with hunger and cold. Mrs. Robins, where I used to work, died a fortnight ago, and I shan't find any one like her again. When one of the ladies goes, it is a job to get another, so many poor creatures are after the charing and cleaning. The Rev. Walker has been a good friend to me, but he says I ought to go into the House. 'A man ought to support his wife and children,' he says, 'and I hope as they'll catch him,' he says."

"'Yes,' I says, 'but it is awful to go into the House when we haven't done anything wrong, and my father an organist.'

"'Very cruel, Mrs. Blake,' he says, 'but I see no other way. I will write to the Guardians to ask if they will allow you out-relief, but I fear they will say you are too destitute!'

"And now, Mrs. Wells, we had better be starting. I hope if they find him I shall be able to

pay up the back rent; the table and chairs left I hope you will keep towards the payment of the debt. Thank you for all your kindness."

"All right, Mrs. Blake, don't you worry about that, my dear. Wells is in good work, thank God, and I don't miss a few 'apence. I'm such a one for children, and your H'albert is a beauty, he is; I've been right glad to give them a bite and sup now and again. I know children sent out with empty stomachs aren't in a fit state to absorb learning; it leads to words and rows with the teachers and canings afore the day's over. I can't abear to see people cross with children, and I'd do anything to save them the cane. Well, I hope, my dear, as they'll soon nail that beauty of yours, and that we shall see you back again. Perhaps I ought to tell you that a chap calling 'isself a sanitary inspector called this morning to say as five people mustn't sleep in the top-back floor. I told 'im as the room was let to a widow lady in poor circumstances, and was he prepared to guarantee the rent of two rooms. That made him huffy. It wasn't his business, he said, but overcrowding was agen his Council's rules."

And the old lady held up the document upside down and then consigned it to the flames.

"There will be no overcrowding to night," said Mrs. Blake bitterly.

The children were collected and scrubbed till their faces shone with friction and yellow soap, and then the little procession started to the

workhouse. Mr. Wells, returned from work, announced his intention of giving his arm up the hill to Mrs. Blake, and the young man of the second floor volunteered his services to help carry "H'albert," who was heavy and sleepy, and his contribution of a packet of peppermints cheered the journey greatly. When the cruel gates of the House closed on the weeping children the two men walked home silently. Once Wells swore quietly but forcibly under his breath.

"You're right, mate," said the young man. "This job has put me off my tea. I'll just turn into the 'King of Bohemia,' and drink till I forget them children's sobs."

Note.—I understand that under a separation order the police have authority to search for the husband without forcing the family into the House. I called at the police-station to inquire why this was not done, and was informed that the woman's destitution was so great that they feared the children might die of starvation before the man was brought to book.

THE SUICIDE

In she plunged boldly,
No matter how coldly
The rough river ran;
Over the brink of it—
Picture it—think of it,
Dissolute man.

SHE lay in bed, in the long, clean Sick Ward—a fine-grown and well-favoured young woman with masses of black hair tossed over the whiteness of the ratepayers' sheets. Such a sight is rare in a workhouse infirmary, where one needs the infinite compassion of Christian charity or the hardness of habit to bear the pitiful sights of disease and imbecility.

"She looks as if she ought not to be here?" I observed interrogatively to the nurse.

"Attempted suicide. Brought last night by the police, wrapped in a blanket and plastered in mud from head to foot. Magnificent hair?—yes, and a magnificent job I had washing of it, and my corridor and bathroom like a ploughed field. Usual thing—might have killed her?—oh, no; these bad girls take a deal of killing."

I sat down beside the bed, and heard the usual

story—too common to excite either interest or compassion in an official mind.

She had been a nursemaid, but had left service for the bar; and there one of the gentlemen customers had been very kind to her and had walked out with her on Sundays and taken her to restaurants and the theatre. Then followed the usual promise of marriage and the long delay, till her work had become impossible, "and the governor had spoken his mind and given her the sack."

"I wrote to the gentleman, but the letter came back through the Returned Letter Office. He must have given me a false name, because when I called at the house no one had heard of him. I had no money, and had to pawn my clothes and the jewellery he had given me to pay for food and the rent of my room. I dared not go home; they are very strict Chapel people, and they told me I never was to come near them after I became a barmaid. Then one day the gentleman wrote, giving no address, and saying that his wife had found out about me, and our friendship must come to an end. He enclosed two pounds, which was all he could afford, and asked me to forgive him the wrong he had done me. I seemed to go clean mad after that letter. I did not know he was married, and I had kept hoping it would be all right, and that he would make an honest woman of me. I thought I should have died in the night. I was taken with dreadful pains, so that I could not move from my bed, and though I shouted for help no one heard till the next morning,

when my landlady came to me, and she went for the doctor. The two pounds lasted me about a month, and then I had nothing left again—nothing to eat and nothing to pawn, and the rent always mounting up against me. My landlady was very kind to me, but her husband had gone off with another woman and left her with three children. She was often in want herself, and I couldn't take anything from her. There seemed nothing but the pond; and after the gentleman had played it down so low the whole world looked black and inky before my eyes. I just seemed to long for death and peace before every one knew my disgrace. I came up twice to chuck myself into the pond, and twice I hadn't the pluck. Then last night I had been so sick and dizzy all day with hunger I did not feel a bit of a coward any longer, so I waited about till it was dark and then I climbed up on the railings and threw myself backwards. The water was bitterly cold, and like a fool I hollered; then I sank again, and the water came strangling and choking down my throat, and I remember nothing more till I felt something raising my head and a dark-lantern shining in my face. The nurse came about half an hour ago to tell me that I must go before the magistrates to-morrow; it seems rather hard, when one cannot live, that the police will not even let you die. No, I did not know that girls like me might come to the workhouse. I thought it was only for the very old and the very poor; perhaps if I had known that I need not have made a hole in the water.

But must I go with the police to the court all alone amongst a lot of men? Oh, ma'am, I can't; I should be so shamed. And think of the questions they will ask me! And I was a good girl till such a short time ago. Won't one of the nurses come with me, or will you?"

It is one thing to promise to chaperone a beautiful, forlorn young woman lying in bed, a type of injured youth and innocence, and another to meet her in the cold light of 9 a.m. arrayed in the cheap finery of her class. Her flimsy skirt was shrunk and warped after its adventure in the pond, and with the best will in the world the nurses had been unable to brush away the still damp mud which stuck to the gauged flounces and the interstices of the "peek-a-boo" blouse. A damp and shapeless mass of pink roses and chiffon adorned the beautiful hair, which had been tortured and puffed into vulgarity, and to complete the scarecrow appearance, her own boots being quite unwearable, she had been provided with a pair of felt slippers very much *en evidence* owing to the shrinkage of draperies..

I am afraid I longed for a telegram or sudden indisposition—anything for an excuse decently to break faith. There are not even cabs near our workhouse, and so, under the escort of a mighty policeman, the forlorn little procession set forth to brave the humorous glances of the heartless street-boys until the walls of the police-court hid us, along with other human wreckage, from mocking eyes.

Presently a boy of seventeen or eighteen, small and slight, in the dress of a clerk, came up to my companion and hoped in a very hoarse voice that she had not taken cold.

"This is the gentleman," said the girl, "who saved my life the other night in the pond."

"I don't know how I managed it," said the boy, "but I was passing along the Heath when I heard you screaming so dreadfully that I rushed down to the pond and into the water before I really knew what I was doing, for I can't swim a stroke. I just managed to catch your dress before you sank, but the mud was so slippery I could hardly keep my footing, and your weight was dragging me down into deep water. Fortunately I managed to catch hold of the sunk fence, and that steadied me so that I could lift your head out, and you came round. Yes, I have had a very bad cold. I had to walk a long way in my wet clothes, and the night air was sharp. But never mind that—what I did want to say to you is that you must buck up, you know, and not do this sort of thing. We are here now, and we've got to make the best of it." And, all unconscious of the tragedy of womanhood, the boy read her a simple, straightforward lesson on the duty of fortitude and trust in God.

Whilst he talked my eye wandered round the court and the motley collection of plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses. The preponderance of the male sex bore witness to the law-abiding qualities of women, for, with the exception of the

girl and myself, the only other woman was a thin, grey-haired person very primly dressed.

"Yes, that is mother," said the girl, "but she won't speak to me. She has taken no notice of me for more than a year. I've been such a bad example to the younger girls, and they're all strict Chapel folks."

"Lily Weston!" cried a stentorian voice, and our "case" was bundled into the inner court, mother and daughter walking next to each other in silent hostility. The poor girl was placed in the prisoner's dock between iron bars as if she were some dangerous wild beast, whilst "the gentleman" who was the real offender ranged free and unmolested. Constable X 172 told the story of attempted suicide, and then the boy followed. Then the mother spoke shortly and bitterly as to the girl's troubles being of her own making.

"Anything to say?" asked the magistrate; but the girl hung her head low in shame and confusion, whilst the magistrate congratulated the boy on his pluck and presence of mind.

The clerk came round and whispered in the ear of his chief, who looked at the prisoner with grave kindliness under his bushy white eyebrows; he had more sympathy than the laws he administered.

"Call Miss Sperling," he said to the policeman, and then to the prisoner: "If I discharge you now, will you go away with this lady, who will find a home for you?"

"Oh, yes, sir," cried the prisoner with a burst of hysterical weeping as the bolts rattled from the dock and the kindly hand of the lady missionary clasped hers.

A distinguished Nonconformist once told me that our Anglican Prayer Book was a mass of ungranted petitions, which, after careful thought, I had to admit was true; but at least on the whole I think our prayers for this particular magistrate have been answered.

PUBLICANS AND HARLOTS

Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

It was 7.30 p.m., and in the Young Women's Ward of the workhouse the inmates were going to bed by the crimson light of the July sunset. Most of the women had babies, and now and then a fretful cry would interrupt a story that was being listened to with much interest and laughter and loud exclamations: "Oh, Daisy, you are a caution!"

Had a literary critic been present, he would have classed the tale as belonging to the French realistic school of Zola and Maupassant. The *raconteuse*, Daisy Crabtree, who might have sat as a model for Rossetti's Madonna of the Annunciation, was a slight, golden-haired girl, known to philanthropists as a "daughter of the State," and an object-lesson against such step-mothering. Picked up as an infant under a crab-tree by the police, and christened later in commemoration of the discovery, she had been brought up in a "barrack-school," and a "place" found for her at fifteen, from which she had "run" the following day; the streets had called to their daughter, and she had obeyed. Since then she

had been "rescued" twenty-seven times—by Catholics, Anglicans, Wesleyans, Methodists, Baptists, and Salvationists—but not even the great influence of "Our Lady of the Snows" or "The Home of the Guardian Angels" could save this child of vice, and most Homes in London being closed against her, she perpetually sought shelter in the various workhouses of the Metropolis, always being "passed" back to the parish of the patronymic crab-tree where she was "chargeable." Here she resided at the expense of the rates, till some lady visitor, struck by her beauty and seeming innocence, provided her with an outfit and a situation.

"Shut up, Daisy!" said one girl, quiet and demure as her namesake Priscilla. "You're only fit for a pigsty."

"'The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork,'" sang Musical Meg, a half-witted girl, who had given two idiots to the guardianship of the ratepayers. She was possessed of a soprano voice, very clear and true, and, having been brought up in a High Church Home, she punctiliously chanted the offices of *Prime* and *Compline*, slightly muddling them as her memory was bad.

"Hold your noise, Meg; we want to hear the tale."

"'Brethren, be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist, steadfast in the faith,'" chanted Musical Meg again.

The door opened and the white-capped attendant entered, leading by the hand two little girls of about twelve and fourteen, who were sobbing pitifully.

"Less noise here, if you please. Meg, you know you have been forbidden to sing at bedtime. Now, my dears, don't cry any more; get undressed and into bed at once; you'll see your mother in the morning."

"Why are you here, duckies? Father run away and left you all starving?" asked an older woman who had been walking about the room administering medicine, opening windows, and generally doing the work of wardswoman.

"Yes," sobbed the children; "they've put mother in another room, and we are so frightened."

"There, stop crying, my dears," said Priscilla; "come and look at my baby."

"What a lot of babies!" said the elder girl. "Have all your husbands run away and left you?"

"Oh, Lor'! child, don't ask questions; get into bed, quick." The children donned their pink flannelette nightgowns and then knelt down beside their beds, making the sign of the Cross. There was deep silence, some of the girls began to cry, "Irish Biddy" threw herself on her knees and recited the Rosary with sobs and gasps.

"Oh, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow,
Whiter than snow, whiter than snow,"

sang a blear-eyed girl in a raucous, tuneless chant.

Musical Meg put her fingers to her ears "You've got the wrong tune, Rosie; listen, I'll hum it to you," but finding her attempts after musical correctness were unheeded, she started herself the *Qui habitat* of the *Compline* office.

"Good Lord, girls!" came the shrill voice of Daisy Crabtree; "what's up now? It gives me the hump to hear you sniffing and sobbing over your psalm tunes; let's have something cheerful with a chorus: ''Allo! 'allo! 'allo! it's a different girl again——' "

"Oh! do be quiet, Daisy; wait until the poor little things has said their prayers," came the gentle voice of Priscilla.

"'Different eyes and a different nose——' "

"Stow that, Daisy, or I'll drive those teeth you're so proud of down your throat," said the tall wardswoman.

Temperance Hunt (known to her associates as "Tipsy Tempie," all unconscious of the classical dignity of the oxymoron) was a clear starcher and ironer, so skilled in the trade that it was said she could command her own terms in West End laundries, but like many "shirt and collar hands," she was given to bouts of terrible drunkenness, during which she would pawn her furniture and her last rag for gin. Then she would retire to the workhouse for a time, get some clothes out of the charitable, sign another pledge, and come forth again, to the comfort and peace of many households—for the wearers of Tempie's shirts

dressed for dinner without a murmur, and "never said a single 'damn.'"

Tipsy Tempie was a very powerful woman, and the song died on Daisy's lips as she came towards her, a threatening light in her eyes. "All right, keep your 'air on; if I mayn't sing I'll tell you another tale. When I was in the Haymarket last Boat-race night——"

"Now, duckies, you go and get washed; your poor faces are all swelled with crying—can't go to bed like that, you know; we lidies in this ward are most particular."

"Please, teacher," said the elder child, "governess downstairs said as we were to go straight to bed; we had a bath yesterday directly we came in."

"Do what I tell you. A little drop of water'll stop the smarting of all your tears, and you'll get to sleep quicker."

"Now, then, Daisy," she exclaimed, as the two children obediently departed, "if you tell any more of your beastly stories before them two innocent dears, Ill throttle you."

"Then you will be hung," said Daisy airily.

"Do you think I'd care? Good riddance of bad rubbish, as can't help making a beast of itself. But one thing I insists on—don't let us corrupt these 'ere little girls; we're a bad lot in here; most of you are—well, I won't say what, for it ain't polite, and I don't 'old with the pot calling the kettle black, and I know as I'm a drunkard. My father took me to church hisself

and had me christened 'Temperance,' hoping as that might counterrack the family failing; but drink is in the blood too deep down for the font-water to get at. Poor father! he struggled hard hisself; but he kicked my blessed mother well-nigh to death, and then 'anged hisself in the morning when he found what he done; so I ain't got no manner of chance, and though I take the pledge when the lidies ask me, I know it ain't no good. Well, as I said before, we're a rotten lot, but not so bad that we can't respect little kiddies, and any one can see that these little girls aren't our sort. I ask you all—all you who are mothers, even though your children ain't any fathers in particular—to back me in this." ("'Ear, 'ear!" said Priscilla.) "I ain't had the advantage some of you have; I ain't been in twenty-seven religious homes like Daisy, and I don't know psalms and hymns like Meg; but I've got as strong a pair of fists as ever grasped irons, and those shall feel 'em who says a word as wouldn't be fit for the lady Guardian's ears."

The frightened Daisy had crept meekly into bed; the two little children came back, and Tempie tucked them up with motherly hands, kissing the little swollen faces; Musical Meg started a hymn.

The assistant matron came up from supper, and her brows knitted angrily as she heard the singing. But at the door of the ward she paused, handle in hand, for, from the lips of the fallen and the outcast, of the wanton and the drunkard,

led by the strangely beautiful voice of the half-witted girl, rose the hymn of high Heaven—

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty;
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.

OLD INKY

There be two things that grieve my heart ; and the third maketh me angry :
A man of war that suffereth poverty.

A CAB stood at the door of the workhouse, and a crowd of children and idlers collected at once. A cab there often contained a lunatic or a " d.t." case, or some person maimed or unconscious—generally something sensational. The cabman slashed his whip several times across the window to apprise the fares of his arrival, but there was no movement from within, and an enterprising boy, peering in through the closed windows, announced gleefully : " Why, it's old Inky and his wife, drunk as lords ! "

A volunteer rang the bell, and an aged inmate at once opened the door, and finding that matters were beyond him, fetched a liveried officer, who gazed contemptuously at the cabman and asked satirically what he had got there.

" I have just driven back the Dook and Duchess of Hinkerman to the quiet of their suburban residence after the h'arduous festivities of the season. Her Grace was a little overcome by the 'eat at the crowded reception of the King of Bohemia, and was compelled to withdraw. I

sent the footman round to the town 'ouse to say as their Graces would not dine at 'ome this evening, so I must ask you kindly to assist her Grace to alight."

The crowd roared loudly at this sally, and the porter, opening the cab door, drew out an aged and infirm man, whom he dragged off roughly through the whitewashed lobby. Then he returned for the wife, a shrunken little body in a state of stupefaction, whom he flung over his shoulder like a baby, and then the hall door shut with a bang.

The cabman looked rather crestfallen, and requested that the bell might be rung again, and again the aged inmate blinked forth helplessly.

"I am waiting," said the cabman, "for a little gratuity from his Grace; his own brougham not being in sight, I volunteered my services."

The liveried officer again appeared, and a heated altercation ensued, in the midst of which the Master of the workhouse arrived and endeavoured to cut short the dispute, observing that his workhouse not being Poplar, he had no power to pay cab fares for drunken paupers out of the rates. The cabman gulped, and, dropping his Society manner, appealed to the Master as man to man, asking what there was about his appearance that caused him to be taken for "such a —— fool as to have driven a —— pair of —— paupers to a —— workhouse unless he had seen the colour of a florin a kind-'earted lady had put into the old man's hand afore the perlice ran them both in."

He appealed to the public to decide " whether he looked a greater fool than he was, or whether they took him for a greater fool than he looked." In either case, he " scorned the himputation," and if the Master thought cabmen were so easy to be had he (the Master) had better withdraw to a wing of his own work'us, where, he understood, a ward was set apart for the h'observation of h'alleged lunatics."

The crowd roared approval, and orders were sent that the old couple should be searched, and after a breathless ten minutes, spent by the cabman with his pink newspaper, a florin was brought out by the aged inmate, reported to have been found in the heel of the old lady's stocking. The crowd roared and cheered, and the cabman drove off triumphant, master of the situation.

I found old " Inky " a few days later sitting in a corner, surly and sullen and pipeless, having been cut off tobacco and leave of absence for four weeks. I suppose discipline must be maintained, but there is something profoundly pathetic in the sight of hoary-headed men and women, who have borne life's heavy load for seventy and eighty years, cut off their little comforts and punished like school-children.

He stood up and saluted at my approach; his manners to what he called " his betters " were always irreproachable. I brought him a message from a teetotal friend urging him to take the pledge, but he sniffed contemptuously;

like many a hard drinker, he never would admit the offence.

"I warn't drunk, not I; never been drunk in my life. 'Cos why? I've got a strong 'ed; can take my liquor like a man. Small wonder, though, ma'am, if we old soldiers do get drunk now and then. Our friends are good to us and stand us a drop; and we need it now and then when we get low-spirited, and this work'us and them clothes"—and he glanced contemptuously at his fustians—"do take the pluck out of a man. We ain't got nothing to live for and nothing to be proud on; and it takes our self-respeck—that's what it does—the self-respeck oozes out of our finger-tips. Old Blowy, at St. Pancras Work'us, 'e says just the same. Don't you know Old Blowy, ma'am—'im as had the good luck to ride at Balaclava? I'm told some gentleman's got 'im out of there and boards 'im out independent for the rest of his life. Can't you get me out, ma'am? I ain't done nothin' wrong, and 'ere I am in prison. If it weren't for the missis I'd starve outside. I can play a little mouth-organ and pick up a few pence, and my pals at the 'King of Bohemia' are very good to me. I can rough it, but my missis can't—females are different—and so we was druv in 'ere. The Guardians wouldn't give me the little bit of out-relief I asked for—four shillings would have done us nicely. They listened to some foolish women's cackle—teetotal cant, I call it—and refused me anything. 'Offered the 'Ouse,' as they say; and, though me and the

missis half-clemmed afore we accepted the kind invitation, a man can't see 'is wife starve; and so 'ere we are—paupers. Yes, I fought for the Queen"—and he saluted—"Gawd bless 'er! all through the Crimean War; got shot in the arm at Inkermann and half-frozen before Sebastopol, and I didn't think as I should come to the work'us in my old age; but one never knows. The world ain't been right to us old soldiers since the Queen went. I can't get used to a King nohow, and it's no good pretending; and Old Blowy at St. Pancras says just the same. I suppose we're too old. I can't think why the Almighty leaves us all a-mouldering in the work'uses when she's gone. However, I'm a-going out; I shall take my discharge, if it's only to spite 'im and show my independent spirit," and he shook an impotent fist at the Master, who passed through the hall. "It's warm weather now, and we can sleep about on the 'eath a bit. We shan't want much to eat—we're too old."

* * * * *

A week or so later I heard of the death of old "Inky." He had been found in a half-dying condition on one of the benches on the heath, and had been brought by the police into the infirmary, where he passed away without recovering consciousness. As we "rattled his bones over the stones" to his pauper grave I said a sincere *Laus Deo* that another man of war had been delivered from poverty and the hated workhouse.

A DAUGHTER OF THE STATE

Quis est homo, qui non fleret ?

" No, ma'am, I've never had no misfortune ; I'm a respectable girl, I am. Why am I in the workhouse, then ? Well, you see, it was like this : I had a very wicked temper, and I can't control it somehow when the mistresses are aggravating, and I runned from my place. I always do run away. No, there was nothing agen the last mistress—it was just my nasty temper. Then I got wandering about the streets, and a policeman spoke to me and took me to a kind lady, and she put me here to prove me, and left me to learn my lesson. She takes great interest in my case. Yes, Matron says it is a disgrace for a strong girl to be on the rates, but what am I to do ? I ain't got no clothes and no character, so I suppose I shall always be here now. No, it ain't nice ; we never go out nor see nothing—leastways, the young women don't. There's no sweet puddings and no jam. Some of the girls say jail's far better. Yes, I am an orphan—at least, father died when I was very little, and the Board gentlemen put me and my brothers into the

schools. No, I never heard any more of them. Mother came to see me at first, but she ain't been nor wrote for five years; perhaps she is dead or married again. No, I don't know how old I am; Matron says she expects about eighteen. Oh, yes, I have been in places. The Board ladies got me my first place at a butcher's, only he was always coming after me trying to kiss me, and the missis did not seem to like it somehow and she cut up nasty to me, and there was words and I went off in a temper. No gentleman! I should think not. A damned low scoundrel I call him. I beg your pardon, ma'am, I know 'damned' isn't a word for ladies. I ain't an ignorant girl, but there's worse said in the Young Women's Room sometimes. Then after that the Salvation Army took me in and found me a place in a boarding-house. Heaps to do I had, and such a lot of glasses and plates and things for every meal. I always got muddled laying the table, and the missis had an awful nasty temper, quite as bad as mine, and one day she blew me up cruel, and I ran away. Then this time some nuns took me to their Home, and there I made a great mistake; I thought it was a Church of England Home, but they was Cartholics. Oh, yes, the nuns were very kind to me—real good ladies—but the lady who takes an interest in my case said as I had made a great mistake; I don't know why except that I always was a Church of England girl. No, ma'am, I hope I may never make a worse mistake—for they was good, and they sang

beautiful in the chapel. Then the nuns found a place for me with two old homespun people; they was very dull and often ill, and I was always getting muddled over the spoons and forks, an that made them *urri*table, and one day I felt so low-spirited and nasty-tempered that I ran away again. The worst of places for me is, no porters sit at the front doors and I run away before I think, and then I get no character. But this time I have been proved, and I have learnt my lesson. I won't do it any more. No, ma'am, I never knew I could be taken to the police-courts just for running away—none of the ladies never told me; I thought you were only copped for murders and stealing. Daisy White—she pinched her missis's silk petticoat to go out in on Sunday, and now she's out of jail no one won't have her any more. But it's mostly misfortunes that brings girls here, and fits of course. Blanche, that big girl with the squint eye, went off in a fit yesterday as we were scrubbing the wards. No, I don't have no fits, and I'm honest as the day. Would I be a good girl and not run away if you get me a place? Oh, ma'am, only try me. The kind ladies quote textesses to me, but they never get me a job. No, I don't mind missing my dinner. Matron will keep it hot for me, but it's only suet pudding to-day with very little sugar. In situations they give you beautiful sweet puddings nearly every day, and Juliet Brown—she that's in with her third misfortune—she says she's lived with lords and ladies near the King's Palace

at Buckingham—at least, she pretends she has—well, she says in her places the servants had jam with their tea every day.

"No, I haven't got no clothes but these workhouse things, but Matron keeps a hat and jacket to lend to girls who ain't got none. Oh! it is beautiful to see the sun shining, and the shops, and the horses, and the ladies walking about, and the dear little children. I love children. Often when the Labour Mistress wasn't about I ran up to the nursery to kiss the babies. Juliet's third misfortune is a lovely boy with curls. I haven't been out of doors for three months—the young women mayn't go out in the workhouse, only the old people—so you can guess I like it: but the air makes me hungry. We had our gruel at seven this morning. We don't have no tea for breakfast, but girls do in situations, I know, and as much sugar as they like—at least, in most places. Thank you, ma'am, I should love a bun. I love cakes. Yes; I have a cold in my head, and I ain't got no pocket-handkerchief. I've lost it, and it wasn't very grand. An old bit of rag I call it. It would be so kind of you to buy me one, ma'am. I know it looks bad to go to see ladies without one. I ain't an ignorant girl; the kind lady who takes an interest in my case always said so. Isn't that barrel-organ playing beautiful! It makes me want to dance, only I don't know how. Daisy White—she that pinched the silk petticoat—can dance beautiful; some of us sing tunes in the Young Women's Room, and she'd dance. I love music—

that's why I liked the Cartholic Home best ; the nuns sang lovely in the chapel.

" Is this the house ? Ain't it lovely ! I never saw such a beautiful droring-room in all my life. Just look at the carpet and the flowers and the pictures ! Ain't that a beautiful one, ma'am, with the trees and the water running down the rocks, and the old castle at the back ! The nuns at the Cartholic Home once took us an excursion by train to a place just like that, and whilst we were having our tea the old castle turned sudden all yellow in the sun—just like Jerusalem the Golden.

" Do you think the lady will have me, ma'am ? I shan't never want to run away here. I will be a good girl, ma'am ; I promise I will be good."

IN THE PHTHISIS WARD

Why, O my God, hast Thou forsaken Me ?
Not so My mother ; for behold and see,
She steadfast stands ! O Father, shall it be
That she abides when Thou forsakest Me ?

THREE days of frost had brought the customary London fog — dense, yellow, and choking, Londoners groped their way about with set, patient faces, breaking out, however, into wild jubilation in the bowels of the earth, where the comparative purity and brightness of the atmosphere of the Tube railway seemed to rush to their heads like cheap champagne.

In the Open-air Ward of the workhouse infirmary the sufferers coughed and choked away their last strength in the poisonous atmosphere ; the cold was very great, but the fever in their veins kept the patients warm, though the nurses went about blue and shivering, and on the side of the ward open to the elements the snow had drifted in, melted, and frozen again, making a perilous slide for the unwary. The sky was black as at midnight, but according to the clock the long night had ended, the long day had begun, the patients were washed, the breakfast was served,

and a few, who were well enough, got up, dressed themselves, and occupied themselves with a book or paper. One man worked furiously at rug-making, his knotted fingers dragging the hanks of wool through the canvas as if his life depended on speed. By the side of the ward open to the fog lay a young man so wasted and shrunken that he looked almost like a child. When the nurse brought him his breakfast he raised his head eagerly: "Has mother come?"

"Why, Teddy, you're dreaming! Your mother has only just gone; it's morning, my dear, and she had to get back to the factory; but she'll be here again this evening, never fear. You have a mother in ten thousand, lucky boy! Now get your breakfast."

Teddy's head fell back again in apathetic indifference, and he listened forlornly to a dispute between two men who had been playing dominoes. One had accused the other of cheating, and an angry wrangle had arisen, till at length the nurse had stepped in and stopped the game.

Later on the same men began to dispute about horse-racing, and the world-renowned names of Ladas and Persimmon and Minoru, etc., figured largely.

"I tell you Persimmon was the King's 'oss, and he won the Derby in 1898. I know I'm right, because it was the year I got the Scripture Prize at Netherwood Street."

"No, that warn't till 1900, and I'll tell you why——"

"I tell you it war!"

"I tell you it warn't!"

Again the nurse intervened, and tried to distract the disputants with a copy of a newspaper, but the warfare was renewed after her back was turned, to the amusement or irritation of the sufferers.

In the farther corner of the ward a man in delirium raved and blasphemed, occasionally giving rapid character-sketches of some woman—not complimentary either to her taste or morals; then he would relapse into semi-unconsciousness and wake with a loud, agonized cry for his mother.

In the afternoon a visitor came to see Teddy Wilson. Teddy had sung in the choir and his vicar called often to visit him. Teddy had been a prize-scholar of the L.C.C. schools; from scholarship to scholarship he had passed to a lawyer's office in the City; and then one day he had begun to cough and to shiver, and the hospital to which he had been taken had seen that phthisis was galloping him to the grave. They did not keep incurable cases, and Teddy had been passed on to die in the workhouse infirmary. When Teddy found himself a pauper he had raged furiously and futilely, and the gallop to the grave went at double pace. He lifted his head eagerly when the nurse brought the clergyman to his bedside. "Has mother come?" he asked, and then fell back apathetically. Yes, he was getting better; it was only the remains of pleurisy. Would he like prayers read? Oh, yes, he didn't mind. Teddy was always docile.

Screens were fetched, and the clergyman knelt down by his bedside. The two men noisily resumed their quarrel about horse-racing in order to show their contempt for the Church, till the nurse stuck thermometers into their mouths to secure some silence.

The man in delirium raved on, cursing in picturesque variety the woman of his love and hate. All around the sick and dying coughed and choked in their agonized struggle for breath.

"Consider his contrition, accept his tears, assuage his pain. . . . We humbly commend the soul of this Thy servant, our dear brother, into Thy hands. . . . Wash it, we pray Thee, in the blood of the immaculate Lamb . . . that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world . . . it may be presented pure and without spot before Thee."

As the vicar read on silence fell upon the ward; the question of Persimmon was dropped, and even the delirious man ceased to blaspheme and lay quiet for a time. It seemed to the young priest as if the peace of God for which he had prayed had fallen upon this place of pain and terror.

Before he went he stopped for a word or a hand-shake with the patients, and settled the vexed question of Persimmon's victory.

"Fancy his knowing that!" said the first disputant. "Not so bad for a devil-dodger."

"They aren't all quite fools. There was a bloke down at Bethnal Green, a real good cricketer

and sportsman; they've made him a bishop now, and as I allus says, there's bigger liars knocking about London than that there bishop."

After tea visitors began to arrive; most of the patients in the Open-air Ward were on the danger list and could see their friends at any time, and now at the close of the day fathers and mothers and wives and sweethearts were coming straight from factory and workshop to comfort their sick. Teddy Wilson, propped up with pillows, watched the door, and presently, when a frail little woman entered, the faces of both mother and son lit up with the light of joy and love ineffable.

"At last!" said Teddy. "Oh, mother, you have been long!"

"I came straight from the factory, dear. I did not even wait for a cup of tea or to get washed. Here are some grapes for you."

The grapes were best hot-house—the poor always give recklessly—and Mrs. Wilson and a bright-eyed little girl who was sweeping up scholarships and qualifying as a typist and *tisica* would go short of food for a week.

Ten years ago Mr. Wilson had grown weary of monogamy and had disappeared. His wife, scorning charity and the parish, had starved and fought her own way. Latterly she had found employment at the tooth factory, but food was not abundant on a weekly wage varying from seven to fifteen shillings, and the L.C.C. had worked the brains of the growing children on a diet chiefly of dry bread and tea.

Through the long night she sat by her son—the long night of agony and suffering which she was powerless to relieve—and the nurse, who was reputed a hard woman, looked at her with tearful eyes, and muttered to herself: "Thank God, I never bore a child!"

In the early hours of morning Teddy began to sing, in strange, raucous fashion, fragments of oratorios. "'My God, my God,"' sang Teddy in the recitative of Bach's Passion music, "'why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Oh, mother, don't leave me!"

The next time the nurse came round Teddy lay quiet, and his mother looked up with eyes tearless and distraught. "He has stopped coughing," she said; "I think I am glad."

AN IRISH CATHOLIC

Godliness is great riches if a man be content with that which he hath.

"God bless all the kind ratepayers for my good dinner and a good cup o' tay to wash it down with, and a nice bit of fire this cold day. You paupers never give thanks unto the Lord, a nasty Protestant lot without a ha'porth of manners between you, a-cursing and swearing, and blaspheming; they have not the grace of God. Say 'Good afternoon' to the lady, Betsy Brown, and don't be so rude; they never do have a word of thanks to the kind ladies and gentlemen who come a-visiting them, and we don't get many visitors just now; all the dear ladies are away a-paddling in the ocean. The gentleman Guardians come sometimes, but they are not so chatty as the ladies, don't seem to know what to say to us old women. You don't happen to have a bit of snuff about you, my lady?—excuse me asking you, but some of the ladies carries a bit for me. I ain't allowed my pipe in here, and I misses it cruel; at first I had gripes a-seizing my vitals through missing the comfort of a bit of 'baccy, and the doctor he seemed much gratified with the symtims of my sufferings, and

says I was attacked by the pensis, I think he termed it, the royal disease of the King, and he was all for cutting me up at once. But I up and says, ' Young man, don't talk to your elders. It's nothing but my poor hinnards a-craving for a pipe and a drop o' Irish, and you'll kindly keep your knives and hatchets off me. The King can be cut up if he likes, but I'll go before my Judge on the Resurrection morning with my poor old body undisfigured by gaping holes and wounds ! ' Yes, I frets cruel in the work'us, lady. If I could only get away back to Kensington, where I belong, I'd be all right. I have no friends here—only you and the Almighty God. I'm a poor old blind Irishwoman, lady ; and my sons is out in Ameriky and seems to have forgotten the mother that bore them, and my husband's been dead these forty years, and he was not exakly one to thank God for on bare knees—God rest his poor black sowl ! Yes, I've been blind now these thirty years (I was ninety on the Feast of the Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel), and one day in the winter we'd just been saying Mass for the sowl of the Cardinal Newman, and when I got back home I put up a bit of gunpowder to clane the chimbly, which smoked cruel (I always was a decent, clane body) and the wicked stuff turned round on me very vindictious, and blew down into the room, burning red-hot into my poor, innocent eyes. They cut one out at St.Bartholomew's 'Orspital, and they hoped to save the other, but it took to weeping itself away voluntarious, and a-throbbing like steam-

engines, and the young chaps fetched it out a few weeks later. But I'm a very happy blind woman. Yes, lady, it was dreadful at first, and I'll not deny that the cross seemed too heavy for my poor back—as if God Himself had forsaken me—great, black, thundering darkness all round as I couldn't cut a peep-show in nohow. All night I'd be a raging and a-fighting to get one little ray of light, and then I'd howl and shriek to the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, and then I'd curse and blaspheme and call to all the devils in hell; but no one heard, and the darkness continued dark. But, glory be to the saints! it's astonishing how used you get to things. At the end of a couple of months you seems to forget as there was ever anything else but darkness around, and by the grace of God and the favour of the angels I gets about most nimblous. No, I don't belong to this parish at all; that's why I hopes one day to get sixpence and get back to Kensington. But, you see, lady, it was like this—I came up to call on my poor sister at the top of the hill, and when I got there they told me she was dead and buried (God rest her sowl!), and the shock was so great I fell down overcome, as you may say, by emotion, and a kind gentleman picked me up and brought me in here, and there I lay stretched out on a bed of pain with a great bruise all down my poor side, and my poor hinnards a-struggling amongst theirselves for a bit of comfort, which they've never got since I've been here, and the young chap of a doctor a-talking in long and indecent

words to the nusses. (I hear you inmates a-smiling again !) But I was not in liquor lady—s'help me it's God's truth ! (May your lips stiffen for ever, sitting there a-grinning and a-mocking at God's truth !) I've allus been a sober woman, and I've always conducted myself. (God blast you all, and your children and children's children !) Yes, my lady, I know it's not a prison and I can take my discharge ; but, you see, I don't know the way to the 'bus as'll take me to Kensington, and I ain't got sixpence—a most distressful and unpleasant circumstance not to have sixpence. May the Holy Mother preserve you in wealth and prosperity so that you may never know ! If I had sixpence of my own do you think I'd stay in this wicked Bastille, ordered about by the ladies of the bar ? I calls them ladies of the bar, not as they ever give you a drop to cheer you, but because as they is puffed up with vanity and three-ha'porth of starched linen. Yes, my lady, I know as they calls theirselves nusses, but when you're ninety you won't like to be ordered about by a parcel of girls. Oh, my lady, if you would only put me in the 'bus that goes to Kensington and give me a sixpence here in my poor old hand, then may the Blessed Mother keep you for ever, you and your good children, and may the crown of glory that is waiting for you before the Great White Throne be studded with di'monds and rubies brighter than the stars ! How could I get on ? I'd be all right if I only got to Kensington ; there's the praists !—God

love 'em!—they knows me and helps me, and kind ladies who give me the tickets for meat and groceries; and there's the landlord of the 'Fish and Quart'—he'll be near you, lady, before the Great White Throne—and on wet days, when the quality don't come out, I go round to him and there's always a bite and a sup for old Bridget. I hear you paupers smiling again, but believe me, lady, it is the black wickedness of their iniquitous hearts. Ask the perlice, lady—God bless the bhoys for leading the old pauper over many a tumultuous street!—they will tell you my excellent character for temperance and sobriety and cleanliness. They give me a paper from Scotland Yard. which lets me walk in the High Street. I sells nothing and I asks nothing, but I just stands, and the ladies and gentlemen rains pennies in my hand thick as hail in May-time. And do I get enough to live on? I should think I did, and enough to fill the belly of another woman who clanes my room and cooks my food and leads me about. No, I shan't get run over by no motor-car. The Lord may have taken the sight of my eyes, but He has left me an uncommon sharp pair of ears and a nose like a ferret, and by this special mercy I can hear the things stinking and rampaging long afore they're near me. You needn't be afeard for me, lady—old Bridget can take care of herself, being always a sober and temperate woman. Any one who tells you different in this wicked Bastille is a liar and a slanderer, a child of the Devil and Satan, who shall have their portion

in hell-fire. Matron says I've no clothes, does she?—and after the beautiful dress as I came up to see my poor sister with? Yes, I know as I must have a decent gown on in a fashionable neighbourhood. I like to be in the fashion, even if I am blind; but you'll find me an old one of yours, lady, and I shall look so beautiful in it the bhoys will be all for eloping with me as I stand.

"Most peculiar joyful feeling there is about a sixpence if you've not felt one these fower months. The other night I'd been worriting my poor old head shocking all day how to get sixpence in this den of paupers, and when I fell asleep I had a vision of our Blessed Lady a-smiling most gracious like and a-stretching out a silver sixpence bright as the glory round her most blessed head. I cried cruel when I woke, sixpence seemed so far off; but now, thanks be to God and to all His howly angels, my dream is true!"

AN OBSCURE CONVERSATIONIST

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

. . . . .

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

"AYE, lass, but you ain't been to see me for a long time, and me been that queer and quite a fixture in bed all along of catching cold at that funeral. Been abroad, have you? Oh, well, you're welcome, for I've been a bit upset about not seeing you and because of a dream I 'ad. I dreamt I was up in 'eaven all along of the Great White Throne and the golden gates, with 'oly angels all around a-singing most vigorous. Mrs. Curtis was there, and my blessed mother and my niece Nellie and the Reverent Walker—you know the Reverent Walker, ma'am, 'im as I sits under? —yes, I like little Walker, what there is of him to like, for I wish he was bigger; but he was all right in my dream, larger than life, with a crown on 'im; but I missed some of you, and I says to

myself: 'Mrs. Nevinson ain't 'ere,' so I'm glad, lass, as you're safe like.

"Yes, I've been that queer I couldn't know myself, and though I'm better I'm that bone-lazy I can't move, but I'll be all right again soon and I'll get those petticoats of yourn finished which I am ashamed of having cluttering about still. I've 'ad what's called brownchitis. Mrs. Curtis fetched the doctor when I was took bad, and they built me up a sort of tent with a sheet, and a kettle a-spitting steam at me through a roll of brown paper they fixed on the spout, and I 'alf-killed myself with laughing at such goings-on. I was that hot and smothered I had to get up in the middle of the night and get to the open window to take a breath of fog, for you can't call it air; I felt just like a boiled lobster. I ain't had nothing to do with doctors before and I don't understand their ways. This young chap 'e got 'old on a piece of wood and planked it down on my chest with 'is ear clapped to the other end. 'Say ninety-nine,' 'e says as grave as a judge. 'Sir,' I says, 'I'm not an imbecile, and not having much breath to spare I'll keep it to talk sense.'

"He burst hisself with laughing, and then 'e catches 'old on my 'and as men do when they go a-courting. 'Sir,' I says, 'a fine young chap like you 'ad better 'ang on with some young wench.'

"He guffawed again fit to split 'isself. 'It's a treat to come and see you,' 'e says, 'but you're really ill this time, you know, and you ought to go into the infirmary and get properly nursed up.'

' Never,' I says, ' never ! ' and 'e went away cowed like.

" No, lass, I ain't a-going to no work'us with poor critturs a-gasping and a-groaning all round. I've kept myself to myself free and independent all my life, and free and independent I'll die. Little Walker catched it 'ot the other day sending a sort of visiting lady 'ere—the Organization lady she calls 'erself, so Mrs. Curtis said. Well, she asked so many questions and wanted to know why I had not had thrift, as she called it, that I turned on 'er and I says : ' I think you've made a little mistake in the number. I ain't got no 'idden crime on my conscience, but I'm a lady of independent means, and must ask for the peace and quiet which is due to wealth.'

" I was that angry with the Reverend Walker ! —did it for the best, he said, thought as I might have got a little 'elp from the Organization if I hadn't been so rude. The very idea ! I 'ate help. I've hung by mine own 'ed like every proper herring and human ought to, and when I can't 'ang no longer I'll drop quiet and decent into my grave.

" No, I never got married—what I saw of men in service did not exactly set me coveting my neighbours' husbands, a set of big babies as must have the moon if they want it—to say nothing of the wine, and the women, and the trotting horses, and the betting on them silly cards. Besides, to tell the truth, lass, no man of decent stature ever asked me to wed ; being a big woman, all the

little scrubs came a-following me, but I would not go with any of them, always liking Grenadier Guards, six foot at least. Perhaps it was as well; I should never have had patience to put up with a man about the place, being so masterful myself; besides, ain't I been sort of father and 'usband to my sister Cordelia? Mother died when Cordelia was born, and she says to me: 'Ruth, take care of this 'elpless babby,' and, God help me! I done my best, though the poor girl made a poor bargain with life, 'er husband getting queerer and more cantankerous, wandering the country up and down as fast as they brought 'im 'ome and having to be shut up in Colney Hatch at the end. I was not going to satisfy that Organization lady's curiosity and boast how I helped to bring up that family, and a deal of 'thrift' that lady would have managed on the two shillings a week I kept of my wages, the missus often passing the remark that, considering the good money she paid, she liked her servants better dressed. Cordelia was left with three little ones, and I couldn't abide the thought of 'er coming to the parish and having them nice little kids took from 'er and brought up in them work'us schools, so I agreed to give 'er eight shillings a week out of my wages, and that with the twelve shillings she got cooking at the 'Pig and Whistle' kept the 'ome together. Poor lass! she's had no luck with her boys either, poor Tim going off weak in his head and having to be put away, and Jonathan killed straight off at Elandslaagter with a bullet

through his brain. Yes, there's Ambrose—no, I don't ask Ambrose to help me; 'e's got his mother to 'elp and a heavy family besides. No, I don't take food out of the stomachs of little children, a-stunting of their growth, as nothing can be done for them later, and a-starving of their brains—I pulls my belt a bit tighter, thank you. Yes, I know what I am talking about—didn't I spend nearly every Sunday afternoon for nigh on twenty years at Colney Hatch? Well, the will of the Lord be done—but why if He be Almighty He lets folks be mad when He might strike 'em dead has always puzzled and tried my faith.

"Yes, I lives on my five-shilling pension and what my last master left me; half a crown rent doesn't leave me much for food. I allus had a good appetite, I'm sorry to say, and I often dream of grilled steaks—not since the brownchitis, though; I'm all for lemons and fizzy drinks. The folks 'ere are very kind and often bring me some of their dinner, but Lord! they are poor cooks, and if their 'usbands drink I for one ain't surprised. I can grill a steak with any one, and I attribute my independent income to my steaks; at my last place the master thought the world of them, and when there was rumpuses in the kitchen I used to hear 'im say: 'Sack the whole blooming lot, but remember Brooks stays,' and stay I did till the old gentleman died and remembered his steaks in his will.

"Well, I was going to tell you how I caught

this cold, only you will keep on interrupting of me. I saw as how there was going to be a funeral at St. Paul's, and I thought I'd go. I allus was one for looking at men, and having been kitchen-maid at York Palace, I took on a taste for cathedrals and stained windows and music and such-like, as a sort of respite from the troubles and trials of life.

"It was just beautiful to hear the organ play and to see the gold cross carried in front of the dear little chorister-boys, and I says to myself: 'Their mas are proud of them this day.' Then came the young chaps who sing tenor and bass—fine upstanding young men—and then the curates with their holy faces, but at the end were the bishops and deans and such-like, and they were that h'old and h'ugly I was quite ashamed.

"Well, I thought I'd treat myself to a motor-bus after my long walk. The young chap says: 'Don't go up top, mother, you'll catch cold.' 'Thank you kindly,' I says, 'but I ain't a 'ot-house plant, being born on the moors,' and up I went, but Lor'! I hadn't reckoned how the wind cut going the galloping pace we went; it petrified to the negrigi, as poor mother used to say—no, I don't know where the negrigi is—but take off your fur-coat top of a motor-bus in a vehement east wind and perhaps you'll feel.

"Yes, that's little Walker's bell a-going—it ain't a wedding and it ain't a funeral; it's a kind of prayers that he says, chiefly to 'isself, at five o'clock—'e's 'Igh Church.

"Must you be going? Well, come again soon; being country yourself, you understands fresh air as folk brought up among chimbleys can't be expected to—but don't worry me about no infirmaries, for I ain't a-going, so there!

"Mrs. Curtis has her orders, and when I'm took worse she's to put me in the long train that whistles and goes to York—yes, I've saved up the railway fare, and from there I can get 'ome and die comfortable on the moor with plenty of air and the peace of God all around."

* * * * *

The landlady came to open the door for me as I went down the well-scrubbed staircase. "Yes, ma'am, Miss Brooks is better, but she's very frail; the doctor thinks as she can't last much longer, but her conversation continues as good as ever. My old man or one of my sons goes up to sit with her every evening; she's such good company she saves them the money for the 'alls, and makes them laugh as much as Little Tich. We'll take care of her, ma'am; the Reverent Walker told me to get whatever she wanted, and 'e'd pay, and all the folks are real fond of her in the house, she's that quick with her tongue.

"No, ma'am, she'll never get to York, she's too weak, but the doctor told me to humour her."

MOTHERS

For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; . . . astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

EVERY first Monday of the month a trainload of shabby, half-starved women moves southwards from London to one of our great Poor Law schools; and perhaps in the whole world, spite of poverty, hunger, and rags, there is no more joyous band. For two blessed hours they meet their children again, and though later they return weary, hungry, and heart-sore, nothing is allowed to mar the joy of the present, for the poor are great philosophers, and hold in practice as well as in theory that "an ounce of pleasure is worth a peck of pain."

Humour exudes from every pore; triumphs are related on all sides—triumphs over civil authorities, triumphs over Boards of Guardians, triumphs over "Organization ladies" and "cruelty men"; and methods are discussed as to the best way of triumphing over the school authorities and conveying sweets and cakes to the children.

"Yes, 'e kept 'is word and had me up, but I

said as I was a widder, and had to keep the girl at 'ome to mind the sick children, and the beak dismissed the summons, and I came out and danced a jig under 'is nose. 'Done you again, old chap,' I says, and 'e looked fit to eat me.

"'E's a good sort, our chairman, with a terrible soft spot in his heart for widows. We allus says you have only got to put on a widow's crape and you can get what you like out of him; so Mrs. James upstairs—she's been a milliner, you know—she rigged me out with a little bonnet, and a long crape fall, and a white muslin collar, and she pulled my 'air out loose round my ears, and gave me a 'andkerchief with an inch border of black, and she says, 'There, Mrs. Evans, there ain't a bloke on the Board as won't say you are a deserving case,' and sure enough they went and did just as I told them as good as gold. If I'd my time over again I'd come into the world a widder born."

"Just what I says. When Spriggs was alive we were half-clemmed, but nothing could we get from the parish, 'cos they said 'e was an able-bodied man. Spriggs wasn't a lazy man, and 'e did try for work, and he wasn't a drunkard though 'e did fall down under the motor-bus, one of his mates standing 'im a drink on a empty stomach, which we all knows flies quicker to the 'ead. It don't seem right as married ladies a-carrying the kiddies should always go 'ungry, but it's the fact. Since Spriggs was took and the inquest sat on 'im we've had enough, but

it's too late to save the little 'un, who was born silly, and Ernest was put away in Darenth, and I always says it was being starved, and the teacher always a-caning of 'im because 'e couldn't learn on an empty stomach."

"Best not to marry, I says, and then if 'e falls out of work we can go to the parish and get took in on our own, and you don't 'ave to keep 'im later on. Did you 'ear about Mrs. Moore? Mrs. Moore was our landlady, and 'er 'usband went off about three year ago with the barmaid at 'The Bell'; the perlice tells 'er as she must come in the 'Ouse whilst they looked for 'im, but she said she wouldn't, not if it was ever so, and she was glad to be rid of bad rubbish. So she went to 'er old missis, who lent her money to set up a lodging-house, and, being a good cook, she soon had a 'ouseful, and brings up the three little ones clean and well-behaved like ladies' children. Then the Guardians sent the other day to say as Moore had been taken off to Colney Hatch, mad with drink and wickedness, and she'd got to pay for 'im in there. Well, Mrs. Moore went to appear afore the Board. Lord! we 'alf split ourselves with laughing when she was a-telling us about it; she's got a tongue in 'er head, as cooks have, I notice; the heat affects their tempers; and she went off in one of 'er tantrums and fair frighted them.

"'I'm sure you'd like to pay for your 'usband, Mrs. Moore,' says the little man wot sits in the big chair.

" 'I'm quite sure I shouldn't,' says Mrs. Moore; 'e's never been a 'usband to me, pawning the 'ome and drinking and carrying-on with other women shocking. 'E promised to support me, 'e did: " with all my worldly goods I thee endow," and lies of that sort, but I made no such promise, and I won't do it. Working 'ard as I can I just keep a roof and get food for the four of us, and if you takes a penny out of me I don't pay it, and I drops the job, and comes into the 'Ouse with Claude and Ruby and Esmeralda, and lives on the ratepayers, same as other women, which I 'as a right to, being a deserted woman for three years, while 'e kep 'is barmaids—or they kep 'im, which is probable if I knows Moore. And my young Claude being a cripple for life, 'is father kicking 'im when he was a crawler in one of 'is drunken fits. You may fine me and imprison me, and 'ang me by the neck till I am dead, but not a 'apenny shall you get out of me.'

" They told her to be quiet, but she wouldn't, and they pushed 'er out of the room and into the street, still talking, and quite a crowd came round and listened to 'er, and they all says, 'Quite right; don't you pay it, my gal,' and she didn't, and no one ain't asked 'er any more about it. She fair frighted that Board of Guardians, she says. She's a fine talker, is Mrs. Moore, and nothing stops 'er when she's once started."

" I'm another who's done better since mine died," said a frail little woman on crutches, with a red gash across her throat from ear to ear, " and

'e was a real good 'usband, as came 'ome regular and did 'is duty to us all till he lost his work through the firm bankrupting, and not a job could 'e get again. And somehow, walking about all day with nothing in 'is inside, and 'earing the kids always crying for bread, seemed to turn 'im savage and queer in 'is head. 'E took to sleeping with a carving-knife under the pillow, and hitting me about cruel. I knew it was only trouble, and didn't think wrong of the man, but I went to ask the magistrate for advice just what to do, as I thought 'is brain was queer, and yet didn't want 'im put away. And the beak said 'e didn't think much of a black eye, and I'd better go 'ome and make the best of 'im. Just what I did, but 'e got worse, and the Organization lady said as we must go to the 'Ouse, or she'd have the cruelty man on us. And Jack got wild and said 'e wasn't so cruel as to have bred paupers, and they should go with 'im to a better land, far, far away. That night 'e blazed out shocking, as you know, for it was all in *Lloyd's News*, and cut little Daisy's throat, and rushed at H'albert, killing them dead. I'd an awful struggle with 'im, but I jumped out of the window just in time, though my throat was bleeding fearful, and I broke both legs with the fall. The perlice came then, but it was too late; 'e'd done for 'imself and the two children, though I always give thanks to Mrs. Dore, who came in whilst 'e was wrestling with me, and took off the little ones and locked them up in

the top-floor back. I done better since then—the Board's took Amy and Leonard, and I manage nicely on my twelve shillings a week, with only Cholmondeley and the baby to look after. But it don't seem right somehow."

"No, it ain't right; married ladies ought not to go short, but we always do. Boards and Organization ladies think as men keeps us. Granny says they most always did in her day, and rich people does still, I suppose, but it ain't the fashion down our street, and it falls 'eavy on the woman what with earning short money and being most always confined. My son says as it's the laws as is old, and ought to be swept somewhere into limbo, not as I understands it, being no scholard."

"Here we are at last! Ain't it a joyful sight to see the 'eavens and the earth, and no 'ouses in between; it always feels like Sunday in the country."

"YOUR SON'S YOUR SON"

My little son is my true lover—
It seems no time ago since he was born.
I know he will be quick and happy to discover
The world of other women and leave me forlorn!
Sometimes I think that I'll be scarcely human
If I can brook his chosen woman!

Anna Wickham.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" wailed the old lady, burying her face in her pocket-handkerchief; "to think as I've lived to see the day! I've always lived with 'Orace, and I've always prayed that the Lord would take me unto Himself before I was left alone with my grey hairs. A poor, pretty thing she is, too, with a pair of blue eyes and frizzled yellow curls, dressed out beyond her station in cheap indecencies of lace showing her neck and arms, as no proper-minded girl should. And she won't have me to live with them—I who have never been parted from 'Orace not one day since he was born thirty year ago come Sunday. Yes, I've got Esther; she's away in service: she's Johnson's child; I've buried two husbands, both of them railway men and both of them dying violent deaths. Johnson was an engine-driver on the Great Northern, and

he smashed 'isself to a jelly in that accident near York nigh on forty year ago now. I said I'd never marry on the line again, hating accidents and blood about the place; however, it's a bit lonesome being a widow when you're young, and Thompson courted me so faithful at last I gave in. He was 'Orace's father, a guard on the Midland, and he went to step on his van after the train was off, as is the habit of guards —none of them ever getting killed as I ever heard of except Thompson, who must needs miss his footing and fall on the line, a-smashing of his skull fearful. Yes; I drew two prizes in the matrimonial market—good, steady men, as always came 'ome punctual and looked after the jennies in the window-boxes, and played with the children; but, as Mrs. Wells says, them is the sort as gets killed. If a woman gets 'old on a brute she may be quite sure he'll come safe through all perils both on land and water, and live to torture several unfortunate women into their graves. 'Orace was a toddling babe then, and Esther just ten years older. Fortunately, I was a good hand at the waistcoat-making, and so I managed to keep the 'ome going; 'Orace was always very clever, and he got a scholarship and worked 'isself up as an electrical engineer. One of the ladies got Esther a place at Copt Hall, Northamptonshire, when she was only thirteen, and she's done well ever since, being cook now to Lady Mannering at thirty-six pounds a year. No, she's never got married, Esther—a chap

she walked out with wasn't as faithful as he should have been, a-carrying on with another at the same time; and Esther took on awful, I believe, though she's one as holds her tongue, is Esther—at all events, she's never had naught to do with chaps since. She's a good girl, is Esther; but 'Orace and me were always together, and he always was such a one to sit at home with me working at his wires and currents and a-taking me to see all the exhibitions, and explaining to me about the positives and negatives and the volts and ampts; he never went after girls, and I always hoped as he would never fall in love with mortal woman, only with a current; so it knocked all the heart out of me when he took to staying out in the evenings, and then brought the girl in one night as his future wife. 'Orace was the prettiest baby you ever see'd, and when he used to sit on my knee, with his head all over golden curls, like a picture-book, I used to hate to think that somewhere a girl-child was growing up to take him from me—and to think it's come now, just when I thought I was safe and he no more likely to marry than the Pope of Rome, being close on thirty, and falling in love for the first time! And she won't have me to live with them!

"Mrs. Wells has been telling me I mustn't stand in the young people's way. Of course I don't want to stand in their way; but I'm wondering how I'll shift without 'Orace; he always made the fire and brought me a cup of tea before

he went to his work; and when the rheumatics took me bad he'd help me dress and be as handy as a woman. I can't get the work I used to; my eyesight isn't what it was, and my fingers are stiff. No, I ain't what I was, and I suppose I mustn't expect it, being turned sixty-seven, and I ain't old enough either for them pensions.

"Well, if it ain't Esther. You're early, lass; and it's not your evening out, neither. I've just been telling this lady how Ruby won't have me to live with them; it's upset me shocking the thought of leaving 'Orace after all these years. I'm trying not to complain, and I know 'Orace has been a son in ten thousand; but I'm afeard of the lonesomeness, and I don't know how I'll live. Mrs. Wells says if the Guardians see my hands they won't give me no outdoor relief, but they'll force me into the House, and I'd sooner be in my bury-hole." And again the poor old lady sobbed into her pocket-handkerchief.

"Don't cry, mother; it's all right; you shan't go on the parish, never fear, neither for outdoor relief nor indoor relief. I've left my place, and I'm coming to live with you and take care of you to the end of your days. I'm not 'Orace, I know, but I'm your daughter, and after the courting's over 'Orace will be your son again."

"Left your place, Esther! What do you mean, lass?"

"What I say, mother. 'Orace wrote and told me what Ruby said, and I was that sorry I went and gave notice. 'Orace is awful upset, too,

but there, it is no good talking to a man in love, and perhaps Ruby will get nicer; she's a young thing yet. So when I told my lady all about it she let me come away at once. The family is going to the Riviera next week, and the housekeeper can manage quite well."

"You've left your good place, Esther, all for me?"

"Yes; all right, old dear. I've got a fourteen-year character from my lady, and I'll soon find something to do; I'm not the sort as starves." And Esther rolled up her sleeves, made up the fire, and poured the contents of the indignant kettle into the little black teapot.

"Oh, dear!" wailed the old lady, "you must not do this for me, lass; you're heaping coals of fire on my 'ead, for, as Mrs. Wells often said to me, 'Don't be so set on 'Orace; remember, you have a girl too.' I was always set on the boys, and not on the girls; women's life is a poor game, and when I heard of them 'eathen 'Indus who kill the girl babies, I thought it a very sensible thing too—better than letting them grow up to slave for a pittance. But it is you now who are the faithful one," and she drew Esther's face down to hers and kissed her fondly.

Tears rose in the daughter's eyes; she seemed to remember with a sense of loss that her mother had never kissed her like that since she was a little child, before Horace was born.

"TOO OLD AT FORTY"

I had no place to flee unto; and no man careth for my soul.

Miss Allison sat at her desk in the class-room, where she had sat for over twenty years, and gazed dreamily out of the window into the court-yard below, where the girls of the —— High School were at play. In her hand she held a letter, which had brought the white, rigid look to her face, like that of a soldier who has received his death-wound. Perhaps she ought to have been prepared for the shock; the system of "too old at forty" has long been in working order in girls' schools, possibilities had been freely discussed in the mistresses' room; but, nevertheless, the blow had struck her dumb and senseless. The note was very polite—"owing to changes on the staff her valuable services would be no longer required after the summer vacation" —but Miss Allison had seen enough of the inner workings of High Schools to know that changes on the staff meant that the old and incompetent were to be crushed out to make room for the young and fresh. Miss Allison was not incompetent—her worst enemy could not accuse her of that—but she was getting just a little tired,

just a little irritable; above all, her forty-second birthday had come and gone. Teaching is well known to affect the nerves, and in Miss Allison's case nervous exhaustion caused her tongue to run away with her; her sharp speeches to the idlers of her form were reported at home—losing nothing in the telling—and duly retailed by captious parents to the head mistress; the constant complaints were becoming a nuisance. Moreover, a young mistress, who would take interest in the sports and could bowl round-arm, was badly wanted on the staff. Miss Allison belonged to an older generation, when athletics were not a *sine qua non*; she had never been a cricketer, at hockey her pupils easily outran her, and she had lost her nerve for high-diving—altogether, she had lived past her age. The queer part was, it had all taken such a little time; it seemed only yesterday that she had come to the school, the youngest on the staff, and now she was the oldest there, far older than the young girl from Girton who reigned as head. And yet life was not nearly over yet; Miss Allison remembered with dismay that women went on living for fifty, sixty, seventy, and even eighty and ninety years—it might be that half the journey still lay before her.

She made a rapid calculation in her brain of her little capital in the savings-bank, which yielded her (after the income-tax had been recovered) an annual sum of £10 13s. 9d. Though too old to teach, she was too young to buy much of an annuity with the capital, and she knew

the state of the labour market too well to cherish any illusions as to the possibility of obtaining work. Perhaps she ought to have saved more, but for some years she had her invalid mother mainly dependent upon her, and illness runs away with money; she grudged nothing to the dead, but she remembered almost with shame the amount she had spent in holiday tours.

Her eyes rested with a sense of coming loss on the crowd in the playground, a kaleidoscopic scene of flying legs and whirling draperies, the sun shining on bright frocks and on the loose locks of gold and auburn till the dreary court-yard seemed to blossom like a flower-garden. How she had loved all these girls, toiled and slaved for them, rejoiced in their success and mourned for their disappointments; but the children of the Higher Education, unlike Saturn, devour the mothers of the movement, and suddenly these fair young girls had turned into rivals and enemies, beating her down in the dust with cricket bats and hockey sticks. An hour of bitter atheism fell upon Miss Allison; all her life had been spent in serving "the cause," the Higher Education of Women had been her creed, but now in middle life it had failed and she was left helpless and superfluous as the poor women of an earlier generation, who hung so forlornly round the neck of their nearest male relation.

A dry sob half choked her, as she rose mechanically in obedience to the bell to take her class in geometry.

IN THE LUNATIC ASYLUM

O Father, we beseech Thee, sustain and comfort Thy servants who have lost the powers of reason and self-control, suffer not the Evil One to vex them, and in Thy mercy deliver them from the darkness of this world. . . .
—*Prayer for Lunatics.*

I PASSED through the spacious grounds of A—— Asylum on my way to visit the patients chargeable to our parish. A group of men were playing Rugby football, but even to the eye of the tyro there was something wrong with the game—there was no unity, no enthusiasm; some lurking sinister presence—grotesque, hideous, that made one shudder—worse than strait-waistcoat and padded-room. In conversation the lunatics struck me as no worse mentally than the rest of us outside. Most of them complained of unlawful detention, and begged pathetically for freedom. "It is a dreadful place; why should I be kept here? We have just had a harvest festival, but I'm not thankful. What have we to do with harvest festivals?"

"I am quite well," said a tall, powerful-looking man; "I assure you there is nothing the matter with me," and as I was chronicling the fact in

my notebook a fiendish light blazed in his eyes—the hate of hates, red-gleaming with fury and malice, as if all the devils in hell were mocking behind his eyes. For a moment that seemed an eternity I watched, paralysed, and then two stout warders pinioned him from behind and led him away, swearing. "Homicidal mania," said the doctor shortly; "we have to be always on the watch."

I interviewed the man who would be King, and heard his theory as to the illegal usurpation of the Throne by the Guelph family. I saw a new Redeemer of the world, and the woman who had conducted one of the great lawsuits of last century.

The women were more talkative, and complained volubly of captivity. A few were sullen and suspicious, and would not come to the roll-call and I visited them on the stairs and corridors, or wherever they threw themselves down.

The doctor saw to it that my inspection was thorough. I was conducted to the padded-rooms, where maniacs laughed and shouted and sang and blasphemed, some of them throwing themselves frantically against the cushioned walls, others lying silently on the floor, plucking futilely at their sacking clothing. One poor woman lay in bed wasted to a shadow, her bones nearly sticking through her skin. "Pray for him," she cried; "oh, pray for him! His soul is burning in hell; night and day he cries to me for a drop of cold water, but I may not take it to him. Look

at his poor throat where the rope cut; look at his poor starting eyes. Is there no mercy in heaven?"

"Poor woman!" said the doctor. "Her only son was hanged, and it has turned her brain. She is sinking fast. I don't think she can live the day out, and we shall all say 'Thank God!' It is a most pitiful case."

In the general ward I saw a magnificent growth of golden hair plaited round and round the head of a young girl who sat in a corner, her face buried in her hands. Beside her sat a visitor, pressing some hot-house grapes upon her. "Just try one, Mabel darling; don't you know me, dear?" The hands were not withdrawn, but as I passed with the doctor she suddenly sprang to her feet. "Has he come?" The doctor paused, and nodded cheerfully at the visitor. "Very good sign, Mrs. Foster; I will see you later about your daughter." At last it was over; my report-sheet was filled, and with great thankfulness I passed into the outer air. I gazed at the men and women outside with a sense of comradeship and security; whatever their private troubles, at least they were "uncertified," free men, not possessed of devils, grievously tormented. One gets used to everything; but that first visit to A—— Asylum stands out in letters of flame in my memory, and as I waited on the platform for my train, I shivered as if with ague and a sense of deadly nausea overpowered me.

I entered an empty compartment, but just as

the train was starting the woman whom I had seen visiting at the asylum got in after me, and we were alone together. She glanced at me shyly several times, as if she wished to say something; and then, suddenly clutching my hand, she burst into tears: "Oh! I am so thankful —so thankful! Did you see my poor girl today? Yes, I know you did, for I saw you look at her beautiful golden hair—whenever I see the sun shining on cornfields I think of my Mabel's hair. Well, for nigh three years Mabel has sat in that awful place; she has never taken her hands away from her face, nor looked up, nor spoken a word, till this afternoon; and then, whether it was the doctor, or your blue cloak —but, as you saw, she stood up and spoke, and after that she ate some grapes, and knew me again, and grumbled at the way they had done her hair—the nurse says that is the best sign of all, and so does the doctor. Oh! thank God! thank God!" and the poor woman sobbed in choking spasms of joy.

I felt that I and my blue cloak were such unconscious agents in the restoration of reason that her gratitude was quite embarrassing.

"Yes, she has been in there just on three years; acute melancholia, they call it, brought on by nervous shock. Our doctor at home always gave me some hope, but not the people in there. I suppose they see such a lot of misery, they get into the habit of despair. Mabel is my only child; my husband died just after she was born,

so you can guess what she has been to me. Fortunately, I understood the greengrocery business; so when I lost my husband I went on with the shop just the same, and was able to give her a good education. She took to her books wonderful, and got a scholarship on to the High School; she learnt French and German, and went on to Pitman's College for shorthand and typewriting; and at eighteen she got an engagement as typist and secretary to a City firm. She was a wonderful pretty girl, my Mabel; just like a lily, with her slight figure and golden head; and the men came about her like flies; but she would never go with any of them; she was such a one to come home and spend her evenings quietly with me, reading or sewing. Then suddenly I saw a change had come over my girl; one of the gentlemen in the office had been after her, and she had fallen in love with him, head over heels, as girls will. I wasn't glad; perhaps it was a mother's jealousy, perhaps it was second-sight a-warning of me; but I couldn't be pleased nohow. He came up to tea on Sunday afternoon, and I hated him at once; if ever liar and scoundrel was written on a man's face, it was there plain for all to read, except my poor child, and she was blind as folks in love always are. Then, though he wasn't a gentleman as I count gentlemen, he was above her in station, and I could see as he looked down on me and the shop; and, as I told my poor girl, them unequal marriages don't lead to no good. But there, I saw it was no use

a-talking; we only fell out over the wretch—the only time she ever spoke nasty to me was over him—I saw she would only marry him on the sly if I said 'No'—we must let our children go to their doom when they are in love—and so I took my savings out of the bank and gave her a trousseau of the best; and all the time my heart was heavy as lead. Folks used to laugh at me and tell me I looked as if I were getting ready for a funeral instead of a wedding. There's many a true word spoken in jest; and that was how I felt all the time—a great, black cloud of horror over everything.

"You should have seen my Mabel on her wedding-day. She looked just beautiful in her plain white dress and long veil. The two bridesmaids wore white muslin, with blue sashes; and Mrs. Allen—my first-floor lodger—said as they might have been three angels of heaven. I drove in the cab to give my girl away. God only knows how I felt. Folks have told me since that I was white and rigid like a corpse, and that I sat in church with my hand held up before Mabel as if to ward off a blow. We sat, and waited, and waited, and waited. It was summer-time; and, being in the trade, I had not spared the flowers; and the church was heavy with the scent of roses and sweet-peas—I have sickened every summer since at the smell of them. The organist played all the wedding tunes through, and then began them over again—I have hated the sound of them ever since—and still we waited.

The best man went out to telephone for the bridegroom; and my eldest nephew took a motor to drive round to fetch him. The clock struck three, and the vicar, looking very troubled for Mabel, came out in his surplice to say the ceremony could not take place that day; so we all drove home again. Mabel never spoke; but she sat up in her bedroom cold as a stone, with her face buried in her hands, just as you saw her this afternoon, leaning her arms on the little writing-table where she used to sit to do her lessons. She would not speak, nor eat, nor move; and by sheer force we tore off her wedding finery and got her into bed. The doctor came and said she was suffering from nervous shock, and if she could cry she might recover. We pitied her and called him, and the bridesmaids swelled up their eyes with crying, hoping to infect her; but not a tear could we get out of her; not even when my nephew came back with a note the scoundrel had left. He was a married man all the time; and the crime of bigamy was too much for him at the end. My sister and I sat up all night, but we could do nothing with her; and at the end of the week the doctor said she must be put away, as it was not safe for her to be at home. Ah, well! we live through terrible things; and when I left my pretty, clever girl at the lunatic asylum I did not think I could bear it; but I went on living. That is three years ago now and never once has Mabel looked up or spoken till to-day. I think it was your blue cloak;

her going-away dress was just that colour, and it seemed to rouse her somehow."

The train drew up at the terminus, and she held out her hand in farewell. "Good-bye. Please think of my Mabel sometimes. I don't know what religion you are, but if you would sometimes say this prayer for her, perhaps God might hear." She held out a little bit of paper, soiled and smudged as if with many tears; and then the crowds surged between us, and we parted.

THE SWEEP'S LEGACY

(1900)

Most visitors among the poor have come across the person who believes that he has a large fortune kept back from him by the Queen, aided and abetted by the gentlemen of Somerset House and other public offices.

I once knew a sweep in Whitechapel who was firmly persuaded that he had a legacy of five hundred pounds in the Bank of England. "Yes, lady, if I had my rights, I should not be so poor. My aunt, Lady Cable Knight—she married a tip-top nobleman, she did—left me on her dying bed five hundred pounds in gold. The money's in the Bank of England. I seed it there myself on a shelf, labelled A. A.—Anthony Adams—but I ain't no scholard, and the gentleman behind the counter said I must have a scholard to speak for me. The money is there right enough, and I've got my aunt's marriage lines, so that proves it clear."

At first I paid little heed to his story, but after a time I got fond of the old sweep, and began to wonder if I could not help him to obtain this legacy. He was a good old man—always serene, always "trustful in the Lord," though he well knew the pangs of hunger and cold, for younger

and stronger men were crushing him out of his profession. A poor deformed creature lived with him—one of those terrible abortions found in the homes of the poor—epileptic, crippled, hydrocephalous, whom I took for the son of the house but on inquiry I found he was no relation.

"We were neighbours up George Yard, lady; no, he ain't no son of mine, H'albert ain't. He's very afflicted, poor chap, and 'is own family would have nothing to do with 'im, so I gave 'im a 'ome. The lad don't eat much, and the Lord will reward me some day. If I only had that money, though, we might live comfortable!" Of course it was strictly against the rules of the Buildings for "H'albert" to share the room, but even women rent-collectors have hearts.

"If you only had some proof of your claim to the money, I would try to help you," I said one day when the rent had been missed. I had noticed the little room getting barer and shabbier week by week, and to-day the old man, his wife, and "H'albert" looked pinched and blue with cold and hunger. Already I had secretly paid a visit to Somerset House to inspect the will of Lady Cable Knight.

"Well, I've got my aunt's marriage lines; doesn't that prove it? But the Queen she gets 'old of us poor people's money. We've no chance against the rich; we're no scholards—they never larnt us nothing when I was a boy. The man in a paper 'at, that sells whelks in Whitechapel, knows all about it, but he's no scholard neither."

Touched by the want of scholarship amongst his friends, I put my attainments at his service, and we went together to claim five hundred pounds in gold, labelled "A. A." on a shelf in the Bank of England.

I half hoped that, after the habit of his class, the old man would not "turn up." But when I got out of the train at Broad Street, our place of rendezvous, I saw him waiting at the corner, "cleaned" for the occasion, in a strange old swallow-tail coat that might have figured at stately Court dances when George III was king. On his arm he carried a coarse bag of sacking, not quite cleansed from soot. We attracted no small attention as we passed through the City, and it was quite a relief when the classic walls of the Bank hid us from the vulgar gaze, though it was no small ordeal to face the clerks and explain our errand. But I suppose those gentlemen are used to monetary claims of this kind, and to their eternal honour be it said that they never smiled, not even at the production of the sooty marriage certificate by way of establishing our claim.

When at last we passed out again into the roar and glare of the street, the bag provided for the spoil empty as before, I saw the old man draw his sleeve across his eyes, leaving a long sooty trail. "It's no good, ma'am; the poor have no chance against the rich. I didn't even see the bag marked A. A. this time. Most likely the Queen and those gentlemen have spent it all long ago. But I thank you, lady, all the

same, and will you allow me to pay your fare for coming down to speak for me?"

When his offer was refused, he wrung my hand in silence, and then turned eastwards towards his home.

I watched him till he disappeared in the crowd, a forlorn and pathetic figure, not without dignity in his strange old-world garb.

AN ALIEN[1]

"No, I ain't got it, ma'am; he says I'm a foreigner. I filled up the papers same as you told me, and then the gentleman called and asked for the birth-certificate, same as you said he would. 'I ain't got it,' I· says. 'I suppose when I was born children were too common and folks too busy to go twenty miles down the hillside to crow over a baby at Carlisle Town Hall. There were fifteen of us all told, and my father only a farm labourer; if he went abroad the work stayed at 'ome, and 'e'd no time for gallivanting with seventeen mouths to fill. But I've got my baptism here all right; my mother was a pious body, and as soon as she could stand up she went to be churched and take the new stranger to be washed free of original sin in font-water; 'ere's the date written on it, 1837—year Queen Victoria began her most happy reign—you'll believe that, I suppose, in a parson's 'andwriting? Stands to reason I was born afore I was christened; they couldn't put the cross on my forehead, now could they, till my face

[1] Since this monologue was spoken the old lady has received her pension. By the order of September 1911 twenty years of widowhood cleanse from alien pollution.

was out in the world? Silly talk, I calls it, so now don't say no more, but pay me that five shillings and give me the book with the tickets—same as other ladies!'

"'You've lost your domicile,' he says.

"'Don't know what that is,' I says.

"'Married a foreigner,' he says.

"'Well, and if I did, that ain't no business of yours, my lad; you weren't born nor thought of and he died afore you come near this wicked world. He's been dead wellnigh on fifty year, so 'e didn't cross your path to worry you. Couldn't talk English? I says as 'e talked a deal better than you. I understood what 'e says, and I can't make 'ead nor tail of your silly talk, my lad, so there. Coverture? No—I ain't 'eard of that—no, nor naturalization either; you go down and fetch up Mrs. Nash—she's a rare scholard, she is—such a one for her books and poetry. Perhaps she'll make sense of your long words, for I can't. I lived afore the school-boards, and all the schooling I got I found out for myself sitting up in bed at night a-teaching myself to read and write. Not as I think much of all the larning myself; the girls can't keep a 'ome together as we used, and though the boys sit at the school desks a-cyphering till they are grown young men, they seem allus out of work at the end of it,' I says.

"'Yes, yes, you needn't olloa, my lad; I'm not deaf, though I am old and grey-headed. So I can't have the pension because fifty years ago

I fell in love and married a steady young man, who worked hard, and knew how to treat his wife (which 'alf you Englishmen don't), though 'e was a Frenchman? I tell you marriage don't matter; 'usbands are come-by-chance sort of people—you go a walk in the moonlight, and you kisses each other, and then, afore you're clear in your mind, you're standing at the altar, and the "better for worse" curse a-thundering over you. Ah! well, poor Alphonse didn't live long enough to get worse, and his death made me a widow indeed, and though I was only twenty-two, and plenty of men came after me, I never took none of 'em. I didn't want no nasty bigamous troubles on the Resurrection morning. Why should five years out of my seventy-two change me into a Frenchy? What counts is my father and mother, and my childhood by Helvellyn,' I says. 'I'm British-born, of British parents, on British soil. I've never stirred from my land, and I can't speak a word of nowt but English, so stop your silly talk, my lad. And then,' I says, 'if my husband made me a Frenchy, ain't I English again by my sons? (it says in the Book a woman shall be saved by child-bearing)—two of 'em in the Navy and one of 'em killed and buried at Tel-el-Kebir, and a dozen grandsons or more a-serving of Her Majesty in furrin parts—yes, I allus say "Her Majesty"; I've been used to the Queen all my life, and Kings don't seem right in England somehow.

"What stumps me is that you gone and paid

a pension to that woman opposite; now, she's an alien and a foreigner if you like—can't speak a word of English as a body can understand, and she hates England—allus a-boasting about Germany and the Emperor and their army, and how they'll come and smash us to pieces—she married an Englishman, so that makes her English —'eavens, what rubbish! Why, 'e died a few years after the wedding, and she's only been here a couple of years at the most; I remember them coming quite well. So she's English, with her German tongue and her German ways, just because she belonged for a couple of years to an English corpse in the cemetery; and I, with my English birth and life and sons, am French because of my poor Alphonse rotted to dust fifty years ago. Well, England's a nice land for women, a cruel step-dame to her daughters; seems as if English girls 'ad better get theirselves born in another planet, where people can behave decent-like to them, and not make it a crime and a sin at seventy for marrying nice young men who court them at eighteen. I pray as God will send a plague of boys in the land and never a girl amongst them, so that the English people shall die out by their own wickedness, or have to mate only with furriners."

"WIDOWS INDEED"

MRS. WOODS had just returned from her search after work, worn and weary after a day of walking and waiting about on an empty stomach; the Educational Committee of Whitelime had informed her that they had decided to take no deserted wives as school-scrubbers, only widows need apply. Outside she heard the voices of her children at play in the fog and mist, and remembered with dull misery that she had neither food nor firing for them, and she shuddered as she heard the language on their youthful lips; she had been brought up in the godly ways of the North-country farmhouse and the struggle against evil seemed too hard for her.

She fitted the key into the lock of her little bare room and lit the evil-smelling lamp, then she sank into a chair overpowered by deadly nausea; strange whirligigs of light flashed before her eyes, and then she collapsed on the floor in a dead faint.

When she came to herself she was sitting by a bright little fire in the next room and friendly neighbours were chafing her hands and pouring a potent spirit down her throat.

"That's right, my dear, you're coming round

nicely; have another sip of gin and then a good cup of tea will put you right; faint you were, my dear, I know, and I suppose you had no luck at them Board Schools?"

Mrs. Woods raised a weary hand to her dazed head and thought dully before she answered—

"They asked me if I was a widow, and when I said my husband had deserted me over a month ago they said as they were sorry they could not give me any work, they were keeping it for the widows of the Borough."

"Yes, I 'eard that from Mrs. James, but why didn't you have the sense to say as you were a widow?"

"I never thought on that. I am a truthful woman, I am."

"Can't afford to be truthful if you are a deserted woman; men on boards and committees don't like the breed, thinks you did something to drive the old man away, but widows moves the 'ardest 'earts. What you wants is a crape fall and Mrs. Lee's black-bordered 'ankerchief."

"You'll have to get work, my dear. All the pack will be loose on you soon—school-board visitors and sanitaries, and cruelty-men to say as your children have not enough food——"

"There, there, don't upset her again; we'll fix you up all right, my dear, only you must remember, Mrs. Woods, that you are young and ignorant and must be guided by them as knows the world," said Mrs. Lee, a shrewd-eyed old dame of great wisdom and experience, who, like some of the

curés in Brittany, was consulted by all her friends and neighbours in all problems spiritual and temporal.

"First of all, my dear, you must get out of this, you're getting too well known in this locality. Go into London Street right across the 'igh road. I 'ave a daughter as can give you a room, and there you become a widow, Mrs. Spence—just buried 'im in Sheffield. You're from Yorkshire, I reckon?"

Mrs. Woods nodded,

"You talk queer just like my old man did, so that'll sound true. You takes your children from Nightingale Lane, and you sends them to that big Board School by the docks—my Muriel knows the name—and you enters them as Spence, not Woods—mind you tells them they are Spence. Then you starts a new life. There are cleaners wanted in that idiot school just built by Whitelime Church, and I'll be your reference if you want one. I'll lend you my crape fall, and I'll wash my black-bordered 'ankerchief, which has mourned afore boards and committees for the last ten years or more; mind you use it right and sniff into it when they asks too many questions, and be sure and rub it in as 'ow you've buried 'im in Sheffield. I've 'eard all the women talking at the laundry as 'ow they're refusing work to deserted wives, says as the Council don't want to make it easy for 'usbands to dump families on the rates—good Gawd! as if a man eat up body and soul

with a fancy for another woman stops to think of his family and where they will get dumped. Well, I mustn't grumble. Lee was a good man to me and I miss 'im sad, but there is my Gladys, the prettiest of the bunch, the flower of the flock as 'er dad used to call 'er, left within three year of 'er wedding by 'er 'usband, who was the maddest and silliest lover I ever seed till she said 'Yes' to 'im, though dad and I always told 'er 'e was no good. No, my dear, I'm afraid as it isn't the truth, but if folks play us such dirty tricks we must be even with them. Think of your little 'ome and your little kiddies and rouse yourself for their sakes. You are a strong and 'earty woman when you stop crying for 'im and get some victuals into you, and you don't want the Board to get at 'em and take 'em away, protecting them against you and sending them to that great Bastille. Don't give way, dearie. I'll come with you to-morrow. And I'd better be your mother-in-law; folks know me round 'ere, and 'ow me and the old dad 'ad fifteen of 'em, and a daughter-in-law more or less won't matter. Don't give way, I tell you. Give us another cup of tea, Mrs. Hayes."

The next morning a deep-crape-veiled Mrs. Spence, propped up by an equally funereal Mrs. Lee, the black-bordered handkerchief much in evidence, sought and obtained work at the new L.C.C. School for the Mentally Defective, and the terrors of the workhouse, the Poor Law Schools, or even prison were temporarily averted.

THE RUNAWAY

He sat alone, in a corner of the playing field, a white-faced child of the slums, in a dumb agony of loneliness and despair.

He was frightened and appalled at the wide stretches of green woodland around and the great dome of the blue sky above. It made him feel smaller and more deserted than ever, and his head was sore with home-sickness for his mother and Mabel, the sister next him, and the baby, his especial charge, for whose warm weight his little arms ached with longing.

He had always been his mother's special help. He had minded the younger ones when she got a job at washing or charing, and helped her to sew sacks with little fingers quickly grown deft with practice. They had been very happy, even though food was often short, and spent many pleasant hours amongst the graves of their churchyard playgrounds, or sitting on the Tower Wharf watching the river and the big ships.

The nightmare of his short life had been a man called Daddy, who came back when they were all asleep, smelling strong and queer, and then there would be furious words and the dull thuds of blows falling on his mother's slender

body, and he would throw himself screaming to protect his beloved against the wild beast that was attacking her. Once in the fray his arm had got broken, and he had seen, as in an evil dream, a dreaded "cop" enter the room, and Daddy had been hailed to prison, after which there was long peace and joy in the little home.

Then the man came out, and the quarrels were worse than ever, till a kindly neighbour took Percy to sleep on the rag bed with her other children, out of the way of Daddy, who had conceived a violent hatred against his firstborn.

Then one day Daddy was brought home, straight and stiff, on a stretcher. There had been a drunken row at the "Pig and Whistle," and Daddy had fallen backwards on the pavement, and died of a fractured skull. An inquest was held, and much more interest was shown in Daddy's dead body than any one had evinced in his living one. A coroner and a doctor and twelve jurymen "sat" gravely on the corpse, and decided he had died "an accidental death."

Then there was a funeral and a long drive in a carriage with much crape and black about, and Daddy was left in a deep yellow hole with muddy water at the bottom. And peace came again to the widow and orphans.

Peace, but starvation, for the mother's wage did not suffice to buy bread for them all. The rent got behind, and finally, with many tears and much pressure from various black-coated men, who seemed always worrying at the door,

he and Mabel had been taken to a big, terrible place called a workhouse. And, after some preliminary misery at another place, called a "Receiving Home," wretchedness had culminated in this strange vastness of loneliness and greenery. Only two days had passed, but they seemed like years, and he trembled lest his sentence here should be a life-one, and he would never see his mother again. He had not killed nor robbed nor hurt any one, and he wondered with the bewilderment of seven years why men and women could be so cruel to him. Then he determined to run away. It had not taken long in the train. If he started soon, he would be home by bedtime.

"Where's London?" he asked a boy who was hitting a smaller one to pass the time.

"Dunno. You go in a train."

"I know. But which way?"

"Dunno, I tell you."

Near him stood one of the teachers, but as a natural enemy the boy felt he was not to be trusted, and did not ask him.

Then the bell rang for dinner, and they took their seats round the long, bare tables, in front of a steaming plate of stewed meat and vegetables. His pulses were beating with excitement at his secret plot, and the food was like sawdust in his mouth. Afternoon school began, and he sat with the resigned boredom of his kind, chanting in shrill chorus the eternal truths of the multiplication table.

Then some other subject, equally dull, was started, when suddenly his heart leaped to his mouth, and he nearly fell off the bench with the unexpected joy of it, for the teacher had brought up the intimate question of his soul: "Which is the way to London?"

The blood throbbed so loud in his ears that he could scarcely hear the answer. "London lies south of this schoolroom. If you walked out of that window, and followed your nose up the white road yonder, it would take you to London."

Other strange instruction followed—how to find north and south, and all about the sun and moon—but he purposely refrained from attending. By the act of God the position of London had been miraculously revealed to him, and he clung fast to that knowledge, so that his brain was burning with the effort of concentration.

At last the bell rang, and they flocked out again into the playing field. He stood alone with his great knowledge and reconnoitred the situation like an experienced general; a high fence with barbed wire ran round the field (clearly boys had run away before), but on the left of the square school-house he could see the shrubbery and the big locked gates by which he had been brought in with fellow-prisoners two days before.

Clearly, there was no escape but by going back to the house and facing perils unspeakable. So, humming softly to himself, he walked back through the long corridors to the entrance-hall, and out

at the front door, which was standing open, for the day was hot. He sneaked along like a cat under the laurel bushes.

The big gates were locked, but farther down, hidden in the ivy of the wall, was a small door which yielded to his push, and then, by the favour of the angels, he stood free, and ran for his life up the white road which led to London. At the top of the hill he paused and panted for breath. The windows of the great school-house glared at him like the eyes of some evil beast, and, small as he was, he was painfully conscious of his conspicuousness on the white highway. A farmer's cart passed him, and the man turned round and gazed after him curiously. A motor-bus thundered past in a cloud of white, and again it seemed as if every head turned to watch him.

Hot and faint and thirsty, he still plodded on. London, with its beloved chimneys and friendly crowds, would soon burst into view, and his mother, with her cheery "What-ho, Percy!" would be welcoming him. The new shoes of the school were pinching badly. He longed to take them off, but funked the knots, which some female person had tied that morning with damnable efficiency. The sun had suddenly tumbled into a dangerous-looking pool of red fire, and the shadows which ran beside him had grown so gigantic he felt alarmed. Such terrifying phenomena were unknown in the blessed streets of London. The queer night noises of the country-side had begun around him: strange chirrups

and cries from unseen beasts, which seemed to follow and run beside him; and every now and then a horned monster stuck its head over the gate and roared hungrily for its prey.

At length, wearied and hungry, and terrified by the sinister darkness stealing over the landscape, he threw himself down by the wayside. He heard the sound of footsteps behind, and braced himself to meet the knife of the murderer, when a cheerful voice greeted him: "Whatho, sonnie! You are out late. Time for little boys to be in bed."

"Please, sir," said the child, "I am going home to mother."

"Where does your mother live?"

"In London."

"London, eh! But you've a long way to go."

A sob rose and tore at his throat. Still a long way to go, and darkness was coming on—black, inky darkness, uncut by familiar street-lamps.

"Come home with me, Tommy, and my missis will sleep you for the night."

With a feeling of perfect confidence, the child slipped his small fingers into the horny hand of the farm labourer, and half an hour later, washed and fed, he was sleeping in a big bed amongst a heterogeneous collection of curly heads.

"Look 'ere, Bill," said the labourer's wife as she folded up the neat little garments provided by unwilling ratepayers, "'e's runned away from that there barrack school."

"I knowed that," said Bill, knocking the ashes

out from his clay pipe. "It ain't the first time as I've met youngsters on the road, and, mebbe, it won't be the last, as folks in the village have been before the beak for harbouring them, poor little devils!"

"A GIRL! GOD HELP HER!"

THE Lady Catherine Castleton lay dying in the stately bed-chamber of Castleton Hall. Night and day they had sought for my lord in clubs and gambling dens and well-known haunts of vice and pleasure, but they did not know of the rose-grown cottage on the Thames which he had taken for his latest inamorata.

When they told my lady the child was a girl she had given a low cry, "God help her!" and had turned her face to the wall. Great obstetricians summoned by telephone had sped in flying motors from town, but they stood baffled and helpless by the bedside of the young woman, who lay so still and indifferent, making no effort to live.

In the library the family lawyer and the white-haired admiral, her father, sat signing cheques for the great specialists, who had done so little and charged so much.

When they had gone the admiral, who loved his daughter, swore long and vigorously with the gorgeous powers of the seafaring man, and the lawyer listened with fascinated approval.

"I told her what her life would be with a loose-living scoundrel like Castleton, but she would not listen—madly in love with him and his

handsome face, and now he has killed her at twenty-two!"

"I had a very distressing interview with Lady Catherine a few weeks ago. She went away in disgust and despair when I had to tell her that I did not think she had sufficient evidence for a divorce, and that she must prove cruelty or desertion as well as adultery."

"D——d shameful law, sir; can't think how the country puts up with it. But she shall be safe from him if she lives, my poor little girl!"

Then they were silent, for the shadow of death crept nearer.

* * * * *

Outside the park gates at the end of the village, in Castleton Union, another girl lay dying. The local practitioner had been called in on his way back from consultation with the great gynæcologists, and as at the hall, so in the workhouse, he found his patient sinking. "She came in late last night, sir," said the nurse, "and the child was born almost immediately. Her pulse is very weak, and I can't rouse her; she won't even look at the child."

"I hear it is Jennie Appleton, the carpenter's daughter at Kingsford—very respectable people. How did she get here?"

"Usual thing. Got into trouble at her situation in London; the man promised to marry her, but he kept putting it off, and then one day he disappeared, and wrote to her from Glasgow

saying that he was a married man. She came back home, but her father drove her out with blows and curses, and she walked here from Kingsford—goodness knows how. It is a sad case, and the relieving officer tells me she will probably not be able to get any affiliation order enforced, as the man has evaded liability by going to Scotland."

"Abominable!" said the doctor; then he went towards the bedside of his patient, felt her pulse, glanced at the temperature chart, and his face grew grave.

Taking the babe from the cradle, he laid it beside the mother: "You have a pretty little girl."

The eyelids flickered, and, as the Countess had spoken, so spoke the pauper: "God help her!"

"He will," said the doctor, who was a religious man.

"He didn't help me. He let me come to this, and I was born respectable. She is only a little come-by-chance maid."

"Cheer up, my lass! My wife will help you: she knows it has not been your fault."

The doctor gave a few directions, and then left, looking puzzled and worried. He was a good *accoucheur*, and hated to lose a case. What was the matter with the women that they seemed to have lost the will to live?

* * * * *

Three days later, in the glory of the May sunshine, there was a double funeral in Castleton churchyard.

ON THE PERMANENT LIST

(1905)

Now also when I am old and grey-headed,
O God, forsake me not.

"SPEND but a few days in the police-court," says Juvenal, "and then call yourself an unhappy man if you dare." Had he sat on a Board of Guardians, he would doubtless have included that also as a school of personal contentment.

All sorts of griefs and tragedies are brought up before us, some of them abnormal and Theban in horror, some of them so common that we seem to hear them unmoved: an honest man who cannot find employment, women with unborn babes kicked, starved, and deserted, children neglected or tortured, poor human beings marred in the making, the crippled, the diseased, the defective physically and mentally, too often the pitiful scapegoats for the sins of the race.

All these things seem too terrible for words or tears; it is the cheeriness and humour of the poor, their pluck and endurance, their kindness and generosity one to another, that bring a lump to the throat and a dimness to the eyes.

We are a very careful Board, and pride ourselves on the strict way in which we administer our small amount of out-relief; to get it at all

one must be, as an applicant observed, "a little 'igher than an angel," and so it is the very aristocracy of labour that files past us this morning, men and women against whom even the Charity Organization Society could find no fault, a brave old army, seventy and eighty odd years of age, some of them bent and crippled with rheumatism and weight of years, short of breath, asthmatic, hard of hearing, dim in vision, but plucky to the last, always in terror of looking too ill or too old, and being forced into the workhouse.

A few, like Moses, do not suffer the usual stigmata of age. "Their eye is not dim, nor their natural force abated."

"How do you keep so young?" said our chairman, half-enviously, to an applicant eighty years of age, but upright still, with hair thick and untinged with grey.

"'Igh living does it, sir," replied the old man, as he took his food tickets for the week, amounting to 3s. 1¾d. One old lady of eighty-two runs a private school, and, in spite of the competition of free education and palatial school buildings, she has six pupils, whose parents value individual attention and "manners" at sixpence per head a week. She is fully qualified and certificated, and is a person of strong views and much force of character, and not only holds Solomon's opinions upon corporal punishment in theory, but still puts them into practice. I wonder which of us will have the conviction and energy to cane boys at eighty-two?

We are a very clean Board, and every half-year the relieving officer brings a report as to the condition of the homes; but some of the old people are so withered and shrunken, and their span of remaining life is so short, that there seems little left both of time and space in which dirt can collect, and I always hope death will free them before they are brought into the bleak cleanliness of the House.

Lately in the workhouse one old man took such an affectionate leave of me that I asked him if he felt ill. "Not yet, ma'am, but I have got to have a bath to-night, and the last one I took turned me so queer I was laid up ten weeks in the infirmary. It does you no 'arm, ma'am, very likely—I've 'eard say as the gentry is born and bred to it—but when they starts a-bathing of us poor people for the first time at eighty in them great long coffins full of water, no wonder our rheumatics comes on worse than ever. And then, ma'am, you forget as you ladies and gentlemen 'ave a drop of something hot to keep the cold out afterwards, and I don't blame you for it, but that we never gets."

On the whole, the old ladies keep themselves wonderfully clean and smart, and the cheap drapery stores in the vicinity of the workhouse do a great trade twice a year in violets and rosebuds at 1¾d. a dozen for the adornment of bonnets; feminine instinct is not atrophied by age, and the applicants know the value of a good appearance before "the gentlemen." The old men are not

so clever, and when deprived of the ministrations of a wife they seem to have no idea of "mackling" for themselves, and too often lapse into a fatal condition of dirt and hugger-mugger. Sometimes the reports are brought by daughters, nieces, or neighbours, or sometimes "only the landlady"—that abused class showing often much Christian charity and generosity.

Some of the old people have led such blameless lives that members of the C.O.S. offer to take them up and save them from the Poor Law, a privilege they do not always fully appreciate.

"No, thank you, sir, I don't want to go there. I've 'eard of the Charity Organization, and the questions as they ask—Mrs. Smith told me they sifted and sifted her case and give her nothing in the end. I'd rather have a few ha'pence from you, sir."

"But you will be a pauper!" said one of the Guardians, in a sepulchral voice of horror.

"Oh! I don't mind that a bit, sir. My mother was left a widow and on the parish at forty. I'm sixty-seven, and I'd work if I could, but they turned me off at the laundry because the rheumatics has stiffened up my fingers, and I can't wash any more, and I don't see why I shouldn't come on the parish now."

Having no vote, and being accustomed to be classed in the category of "lunatics, criminals, and idiots," no wonder the term "pauper" conveys little opprobrium to women.

"Bother the House!" says another spirited

old laundress, who complains that "a parcel of girls" are preferred before her. "I'm too young to come in there. I'm only seventy, and I'll wait till I'm eighty."

One poor old man has his relief stopped because his wife is reported as "a drinking woman," though he is told he may still draw the money if his wife enters the House. "Thank you, sir, my wife does not come into the workhouse. She has a glass sometimes, but she is never the worse for liquor, and she's been a good wife to me. Spiteful gossip, sir. Good morning!" and he walks out, an honourable and loyal gentleman fallen on evil days.

Sometimes cold and starvation is worse than they thought, and they do come in; sometimes they die. The body of an old man was lately fished out of the pond, and at the inquest it was stated that he had lost his employment after thirty years at one place. The firm had changed hands, and the new manager had told him, brutally, "he wanted no old iron about." At seventy-five one is a drag in the labour market, and the poor old fellow, feeling acutely that he would only be a burden on his sons and his daughters, asked neither for out-relief nor indoor-relief, but stood his mates a drink with his last shilling, and took the old Roman method.

However, light seems dawning through the darkness, and I think many Poor Law Guardians will rest better in their beds knowing that old-age pensions seem to have come into the sphere of practical politics.

THE PAUPER AND THE OLD-AGE PENSION [1]

On January 1st the receipt of Poor Law relief ceases to be a disqualification for old-age pensions, and some interesting statistics have been compiled by the *Daily Mail* which show that only about 17 per cent. of old people in the workhouses are applying for their 5s. per week. These are the figures for England and Wales. In the Metropolitan area, where rents are high, and the smallest room cannot be had under two shillings or half a crown a week, the proportion will be lower still.

At first sight these figures are very disappointing, and it seems to some of us who have counted so much on this reform as if we cannot escape from the evils of the workhouse system. But a little thought will show how impossible it is for this generation of old folk to take advantage of the change; the wished-for has come too late; they have burnt their ships, or rather their beds, sold up "the little 'ome"; they have neither bag nor baggage, bed nor clothing. They are like snails with broken shells. There is no protec-

[1] Act amended 1911.

tion against the rude world, and once having made the sacrifice, few people over seventy have the pluck to start life afresh. It is hardly worth while; for them the bitterness of death is past.

A committee of our Board has held three special sessions for the purpose of interviewing these old people, and the answer has come with wearying monotony, "No, thank you, five shillings would be no good to me. I have nowhere to go." Some have sons and daughters, but "heavy families" and crowded rooms dry up filial piety. There is no place for the aged father or mother in our rack-rented city, and the old people accept their fate with the quiet philosophy of the poor. The long string of human wreckage files past us, some bowed and bent with the weight of years, others upright and active, some with the hoary heads of the traditional prophets, others black-haired and keen-eyed still, for the "high living" of the workhouse, as is often remarked, preserves youth in a miraculous way. Some are crippled and half-blind, others suffer with deafness—an ailment of poverty, which very naturally grows worse under inquisitive questioning—and nearly all have rheumatism. A curate once told me that he was summoned to a sick parishioner who was "troubled in mind," and wanted to make his peace with Heaven, but the only sin he could remember was "the rheumatics." The disease seems to be a national sin.

One hears the country accents of the United Kingdom—the burr of Northumbria, the correct

English of East Anglia, the rough homeliness of Yorkshire and the Midlands, the soft accents of Devonshire and the West, the precision of the foreign English of the Welsh mountains, the pleasant ring of the Scottish tongue, the brogue of old Ireland. Few seem Londoners. Take any group of people, and see how few of her children London seems to bring to maturity.

It is our last meeting to-day, and we go to visit those who cannot attend, the sick and bed-ridden in the infirmary—a mere form, for these are vessels which will sail no more, sea-battered, half-derelict, nearing port, and for them the dawn will break in the New Jerusalem. Some are palsied and paralysed and half-senile, but now and again keen old eyes look at us from the whiteness of the ratepayers' sheets and regret they are "too old to apply."

Very ancient folk live in these wards, and their birthdays go back to the tens and twenties of last century, one old lady being born in the historic year of 1815. An old man, jealous of her greater glory, says he is 109, but our register of age gives the comparatively recent date of 1830. Few of them seem to have any friends or visitors. Children are dead, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have forgotten them; but they do not complain, age mercifully deadens the faculties, though their terrible loneliness was once graphically written on my brain by the speech of an old Irishwoman: "I am quite alone, lady; I have no friends but you and the Almighty God."

We have interviewed 103, and only eleven have applied for the pension The wished-for, as I have said, has come too late; but another generation will be saved from "the House" and will be able "to die outside," so often the last wish of the aged.

The merciful alteration in the law will save this generation of "outdoor poor." Old people in the late sixties have no longer been dying of starvation in the terror of losing the pension through accepting poor relief, and the greater independence of the State pensioner is heartening many. "On the Imperial taxes," said an old gentleman with a somewhat low standard of cleanliness, "I can be as dirty as ever I like."

THE EVACUATION OF THE WORKHOUSE

(1915)

THE workhouse is being evacuated; the whole premises, infirmary and House, have been taken over by the War Office as a military hospital; after weeks of waiting final orders have come, and to-day motor-omnibuses and ambulances are carrying off the inmates to a neighbouring parish.

One feels how widespread and far-reaching are the sufferings caused by war, and spite of this bright May sunshine one realizes that the whole earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations, the white blossoms of the spring seem like funeral flowers, and the red tulips glow like a field of blood.

It never occurred to me before that any one could have any feeling, except repugnance, towards a workhouse, but some one—I think it was the prisoner of Chillon—grew attached to his prison, and evidently it is the same with these old folk. Old faces work painfully, tears stand in bright old eyes, knotted old fingers clutch ours in farewell, and some of the old women break down utterly and sob bitterly. On the journey some of them lose all sense of control, take off their bonnets, and let down their hair, obeying a human instinct of despair which scholars will

remember dates back to the siege of Troy. "It's all the home I've known for twenty years, and I be right sorry to go," says an aged man, as he shakes my hand.

Folks live long in the workhouse, and seventy and eighty years are regarded as comparative youth by the older people of ninety and upwards; to the aged any change is upheaval; they have got used to their bed, their particular chair, their daily routine, and to have to leave the accustomed looms in the light of a perilous adventure. Perhaps heaviest of all is the sense of exile; it is a long walk to the adjoining parish, and bus fares will be hard to spare with bread at ninepence a quartern. "I've been on the danger list and my son came every day to see me," says one old lady, "but he won't be able to get so far now."

Alarming rumours are being spread by a pessimist much travelled in vagrant wards, but they are speedily contradicted by an optimist, also an expert in Poor Law both in theory and practice.

We try to cheer them, but our comfort is not whole-hearted; we can guess how the chafing of the unaccustomed, the new discipline, the crowds of unfamiliar faces will jar upon the aged. We try to impress upon them the joy of self-sacrifice, the needs of our wounded soldiers, the patriotic pride in giving up something for them. Oh, yes, they know all that, the Guardians had been and talked to them "just like a meeting," they understand about the soldiers, they want to do their best for them; but it is hard. The workhouse is nothing if not military in its tradi-

tions; heroes of South Africa, of Balaclava, and the Crimea have found asylum in the white-washed wards; many of the present inmates have been soldiers, and there are few who have not some relatives—grandsons and great-grandsons—fighting in the trenches. One of the oldest of the "grannies," aged ninety-three, went off smiling, proud, as she said, "to do her bit."

The sick are being brought down now into the ambulances—the phthisical, the paralytic, the bed-ridden—blinking in the sunlight from their mattress-tomb, one poor woman stricken with blindness and deafness, who in spite of nervousness looks forward to her first motor-drive. These are less troubled; they are younger, and the sick hope ever for a quick cure, and the majority are only in for temporary illness. Then come the babies, astonishingly smart and well-dressed, including the youngest inmate, aged but eight days.

The costumes are odd and eccentric, and in spite of misery a good deal of good-tempered chaff flies round. All inmates are to leave in their own clothes, and strange garments have been brought to the light of day, whilst much concern is expressed about excellent coats and skirts moth-eaten or mislaid in the course of twenty-five years. The storage of the workhouse often suffers strain, and the wholesome practice of "stoving" all clothes does not improve the colours nor contribute to the preservation of what *modistes* call *la ligne*. Fortunately, all fashions come round again, and we try to assure the women that the voluminous skirts and high

collars of last century are *le dernier cri* in Bond Street, but it is difficult for one woman to deceive another over the question of fashion.

For twelve hours the 'buses and ambulances have plied backwards and forwards, and now the last load home has started, and tired nurses and harassed officials wave their last good-bye, thankful the long day has come at length to an end. In a few days other loads will arrive, all young these and all soldiers, many of them, perhaps, as the advertisements say, belonging to the nobility and gentry. The workhouse has ceased to be. From to-day it will be no longer rate-supported; the nurses and the whole staff draw rations and are in the pay and service of the War Office. As soon as possible gilt letters will announce it as a "Military Hospital."

On the table before me lies a copy of the local paper, and I read with surprise the thanks of a public body for our "offer to give up the workhouse as a military hospital, and expressing appreciation of the patriotic action of the Guardians in the matter."

In my opinion we made no offer; we merely obeyed a command, and the people who did a patriotic action were those who turned out of their home, such as it was; but in this world credit is given where it is not due, and thanks are bestowed on the wrong people. We reap where we have not sown and gather where we have not strawed.

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